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ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DELIBERATE WRITING INSTRUCTION IN FOURTH
GRADE CLASSROOMS

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Although there are admittedly many, there is one particular topic that I especially delight in rambling on about to my fourth grade students more than any other. It goes like this: Human beings are the only animals who are capable of telling their own stories. I would argue that all living things – animals, plants, fungi, etc. – have stories to tell. But we, *homo sapiens*, are the only ones with the means by which we can actually communicate those stories. And that is something extra special.

I tell my students this to motivate them in their writing endeavors. I want them to recognize that they all possess a gift and that they should share that gift with the world.

But writing is more than just sharing stories. It is a means of connecting, inspiring, and exciting. We also write to inform and enlighten, to convince and sway, to inform and educate. We write to communicate the brilliance inside our minds with the rest of humanity.

In today's modern world, I believe that the power of the written word is as important now as it ever was. Despite the ever-changing rules of the English language, and regardless of whether or not we recognize this fact, it is clear that the modern citizen of not only the U.S., but the world, must be more than competent with their ability to communicate in writing.

When it comes to education, there has historically been an immense focus on mathematics and reading, and rightfully so (McCarthy & Yeon Sun, 2011). However, with the emphasis of those two content areas, there has been a disturbing lack of focus on writing (Coker, Jennings, Farley-Ripple, & MacArthur, 2018). Of course, math and reading are of the utmost importance. But what of one's ability to communicate? Shouldn't that be given as much credence as anything else?

In my limited years as an educator, I have personally noticed an alarming trend: very few schools are explicitly teaching writing. Which brings me to the question that I have long been obsessed with and one that I hope to answer in the course of this paper: *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students' writing skills using the workshop model?*

In order to provide the proper context to answer this question, I will first lay out my experiences with writing personally and professionally. This will shine light upon why I feel this subject is so incredibly important. I will then discuss my concerns with contemporary writing instruction and what the wider-reaching ramifications are of this. And finally, I will present the three main themes that will be explored throughout this paper: 1) The Common Core State Standards for writing, 2) the current issues regarding writing instruction in the contemporary classroom, and 3) the possible solutions to address these concerns.

My Experiences as a Writer and as an Educator

Unfortunately, I have very few specific recollections of my time in elementary school. However, one thing that does stand out, then, and throughout the rest of my life,

is my love for writing. I would somehow squirm out of whatever the actual assignment was and convince my teacher to let me write my elaborate horror story instead. As I grew older, and I was asked to start thinking about a career path, “writer” inevitably became my fallback plan. Though I eventually abandoned my lofty ambitions of being either a prominent horror/sci-fi/fantasy author, or even my later hopes of writing the next Great American Novel, writing continued to factor itself into my life, no matter where I found myself.

A passion for literacy is actually what brought me into the field of education in the first place. After having received a bachelor’s degree in U.S. History, and spending several years working odd jobs in manual labor and the like, I found myself in the unique opportunity where I could make the dramatic change I was looking for in my life. At the age of 27, I decided to roll the dice, leave my old life (and comfortable salary) behind and try something completely new. I began an 11-month contract with Minnesota Reading Corps (a branch of Americorps) and worked as a literacy tutor for 1st, 2nd and 3rd graders. I had never worked with kids before that and had never really been around them either. I had had vague notions throughout my younger years about going into education. But this time was different. I was motivated by a burning passion to do something positive in the world, to make a difference, to lift up my community. And it was the best decision I ever made. I knew then, as I know now, that literacy is of the utmost importance, especially in a society such as ours that requires an informed and engaged citizenry.

Just over 5 years later, and here I am, just having completed my second year as a classroom teacher. The ideals that I held as my reasoning for getting into education,

although evolved, still stand strong. Literacy, in all its forms, is critical to every person. It is how we take in information, process it, and communicate something about it.

I am incredibly grateful for having been placed at the public charter school that I was for my student teaching experience (and even more grateful for being hired on afterward as one of their 4th grade teachers). It was there, in the kindergarten classroom that I was assigned for student teaching, that I first began to form an idea of how incredibly important explicit writing instruction was to students, even 5-year-olds. Lucy Calkins's literacy curriculum, *Units of Study* (2013), which utilized the workshop model, changed my life. It was heavy, it was complicated, it took tremendous time and energy to unpack and understand. And it was brilliant. It aimed high, no matter the grade level it was geared towards. I marveled at how it boosted the confidence of my kindergarteners right at the beginning by referring to them as "writers". Were they yet? Maybe not. But they began to recognize themselves as such, and that's just as important. What began as simple pictures, started incorporating labels, and then eventually statements too. And soon, they were filling up pages with sentences that connected to the stories they were telling.

I have been very impressed with this idea of the 'workshop'. It is all about the *Writing Process*. One does not simply just sit down and write a story or a paper! It begins with careful planning, the gathering and connecting of ideas, mapping and organizing. After something like 5-9 steps of the planning process, only then does one begin to draft! And once the drafting is completed, editing and revising, and then more editing and

revising. Finally, once the final piece is complete, we publish and share our wonderful work with the world (Calkins, 2013)!

With my 4th graders, I noticed a remarkable change in the way they were beginning to communicate after emphasizing this Writing Process throughout our year together. Perhaps it was the high-level work they were doing every day, or the Writing Process we were incorporating into our routines, or maybe even the big ideas I would continuously emphasize with them. Regardless, by the end of the year, even left to their own devices, their writing had become significantly more complex, nuanced and sophisticated. Their ideas were clear and they utilized reasons and evidence to back up their claims. The importance of structure was something I laid on them over and over, and it showed. Even the most struggling students were grasping the foundational ideas of how to properly lay out and organize an essay.

And as their writing skills began to grow and they began to take immense pride in their hard work, their levels of engagement and motivation increased as well. They began to recognize the incredible meaning and power their carefully crafted words actually held.

I would argue that by making this writing workshop model an integral part of our daily routine, it began to have a positive effect on how we thought, how we conveyed meaningful stories, and how we arranged information to sway others. For example, when a student made a statement, they automatically began to compile reasons and evidence to support that claim – as that was a fundamental aspect of the persuasive essay. And in this

era of human history, where Truth appears to be ever more elusive, I would argue that few things are more important than that.

My Concerns

As I first began noticing the importance of explicit writing instruction, I began to connect with two other co-workers at my school who happened to feel the same way about the subject as I did.

One of them, a first/second grade teacher named Ms. Ann, had started at our school at the same time I did. She had been teaching for several years, and had just moved back home to Minnesota after spending the last five years teaching in Washington, D.C. She told me repeatedly that when she came back to Minneapolis and began applying for teaching jobs, the thing at the top of her list was whether or not the school taught the workshop method of literacy instruction. As we became better friends and I continually sought her advice in preparation of my first year as a classroom teacher, my fascination and passion for writers workshop only grew – and this is something that we continue to bond over.

The other colleague, Ms. Maria, has become one of my educational heroes. She is one of the longest serving members of our small charter school, and her expertise lies in literacy instruction, specifically when it comes to the workshop philosophy. As our school's professional development lead, she is a big advocate for the importance of deliberate writing instruction. Even before this first year as a classroom teacher began for me, Ms. Maria quickly took me under her wing, assisted and supported me and continuously advocated for me throughout the year. We have thoroughly connected over

our passions for writers workshop and she has shared with me so many insights and important aspects of this educational philosophy.

I am forever indebted to these two educators and friends. Their support, feedback, collaboration, and insights have profoundly shaped me as a teacher. And I have them to thank for continually validating and supporting my passion for writing instruction, as well as inspiring me to focus on this for this thesis paper.

Unfortunately, after this current school year, our charter will be moving onto a new curriculum, one that does not utilize the workshop model.

Needless to say, all three of us are a bit worried about this change. Although it sounds interesting, exciting, and applicable, my concern is that without that deliberate writing instruction being such a pivotal part of their daily routines, students will no longer be as capable of the complex and sophisticated writing abilities as they would be if we continued to focus on it; nor, I fear, will they be as motivated to challenge themselves with this complicated work.

And overall, throughout my experiences, I've noticed that this fits into an alarming trend, nationally.

As this change-in-curriculum story began to unfold, I found myself at dinner one evening with my teaching colleagues that I had gone through my licensure program with. As this writing-instruction topic was heavily on my mind, I asked them all: "How many of you are teaching writing in your classrooms?" My colleagues spanned from pre-k to high school language arts educators and everything in between, and they worked both in

the suburbs as well as the city. However, not a single person among us (aside from me) had ever participated in explicitly teaching writing in the classroom.

Although this is merely a tiny sample, my concern is that this is all too indicative of our national educational priorities as a whole (Goldstein, 2017). And I would argue that this is an alarming trend indeed, especially considering the demands of the informed and engaged citizen in the modern world.

It has been my experience that if students are deliberately taught what goes into strong stories and essays, and they routinely have the opportunity to put those ideas into practice, that they are developing not only strong writing skills, but they are training their brains to think that way as well. If one has an opinion, it is only valid if it is backed up with reasons and evidence. If one does not have those two critical components, the argument is not especially valid at all. I feel that this distinction is of the highest importance at this time in our country.

If students are simply not being taught what makes for a meaningful story or a powerful essay, that the effects of this lack of skills will have wide-reaching and negative implications. To begin with, by the time they're in middle school, high school and eventually college, they're simply *expected* to be able to put together a well-structured, carefully-crafted, and logically-sound essay. All students are routinely asked to produce this type of writing throughout their academic careers. Would we expect them to be able to work through complex mathematical equations without deliberately teaching them the rules involved? Absolutely not. I would argue that this is one of the biggest reasons why so many young people struggle with the leap from high school to college: They have not

been taught to think critically or in the sophisticated way they are expected to by that stage in their education.

Capstone Topic

This paper aims to answer the question: *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students' writing skills using the workshop model?*

In order to properly answer this question, I will be focusing on three specific themes of the topic. First, there will be a close examination of the Common Core State Standards and what their implementation means for today's educational system. Since their advent, many changes have taken place in our nation's public schools. One of those changes is the fact that writing is now a critical component and demands quite a lot from both students and educators.

Next, I would like to discuss the fact that despite having this new emphasis on writing in the academic standards that the majority of the country adopted, there are still a plethora of issues as to why it still is not being taught, and why students, overwhelmingly, still are not meeting those standards (Goldstein, 2017).

And finally, I would like to thoroughly examine a variety of possible solutions to those problems. Although the research on writing instruction and development is surprisingly lacking, there are a number of evidence-based strategies that can be implemented in today's classrooms that appear to increase both student enthusiasm for writing, as well as their abilities to excel with the skill (Calkins, 1994; Graham & Harris, 2013).

Summary

This chapter has covered my personal and professional experiences with writing, displayed my concerns for the state of writing instruction in U.S. schools, and laid out the three overarching themes that will be explored throughout the course of this paper. By first researching the literature that was already available, and then conducting my own research project within my fourth grade class where I observed, collected data, and analyzed the results of a research-based paper that the participants conducted themselves, I intended to further analyze the guiding themes of this paper (the Common Core State Standards, the issues involving writing instruction in classrooms, and possible solutions to address those problems). In doing so, I hope to have ultimately answered my research question of *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students' writing skills using the workshop model?*

The next chapter, the Review of the Literature, will examine the current bodies of research on each of those themes. This will illustrate significant background information on the topic and give the reader a better understanding of what the experts have to say concerning this research question. Chapter three is focused with the methodology of the actual research study that I implemented in my fourth grade classroom. It will show the demographic information of the participants, describe the writing unit that I will be utilizing for the research, the type of data that I collected, and the means by which I collected it. This will allow the reader to get a full understanding of exactly how the study was implemented and why it was done in the way that I chose. Following this will be chapter four, where I will discuss the results of the study. I will thoroughly analyze

and describe the collected data, paying particular attention to the presented trends found throughout the course of the study. And finally, with chapter five, the conclusion, I will focus on what was learned, not just from the data collected, but from the entire research project itself.

In a variety of ways, writing has long been a passion of mine, personally and professionally. It is my hypothesis that by explicitly teaching the components of strong writing, focusing on the Writing Process, and thoroughly practicing these ideas routinely in the classroom each day, students gain the habit of how to effectively and efficiently communicate their ideas in their writing and be continuously motivated to do so, both in the classroom and in the real world.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The contemporary state of writing instruction in U.S. schools is, admittedly, significantly lacking (Coker, Jennings, Farley-Ripple, & MacArthur, 2018). “Despite the importance of writing, it has historically received less attention in standards, curriculum, and instruction,” Woodard and Kline claimed (2016, p. 207). Even though there have been vast changes taking place (oftentimes for the better) in education, little seems to have been done to either increase the amount of writing instruction in schools, nor in actually growing students writing skills (Goldstein, 2017). However, even though much more research will be required in this field, there are a number of evidence-based practices that have been shown to increase both motivation and competency (Calkins, 1994).

This chapter’s goal is to examine the body of research that exists in terms of the three themes of this paper in order to answer the question of *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students’ writing skills using the workshop model?*

First, there is a brief history of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for writing, as well as an examination of the implications the adoption of this policy has had

on writing instruction and skill development (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2018). Not only will I discuss how the writing standards associated with the CCSS and how they contribute to improving student skills in the subject, but I will also explore what the wider-reaching ramifications are beyond the realm of education and academia, and discuss why these skills are important to have to be successful in the real-world as well.

Next, I discuss the concerns and issues currently facing teachers of writing instruction in the U.S. education system since the adoption of the CCSS. While of course there are many, this chapter focuses on the three that I have found that seem to be the largest inhibitors for students to be successful with their writing abilities: a lack of time on the teacher's part, the absence of solid research on the subject, and most importantly, the fact that educators are not being trained on how to teach writing in their classrooms.

Finally, I present some possible solutions to overcome those challenges, meet those academic standards, and increase the motivation and abilities of students when it comes to their writing. There will be an exploration of a number of qualities that have been shown to increase student motivation and buy-in as well as an examination of the importance of the *Writing Process*.

In exploring these three important themes, I hope to thoroughly present the relevant background information required to answer the guiding question of this paper: *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students' writing skills using the workshop model?*

Common Core Standards for Writing

Background. For good or for ill, in 2010, the majority of the states in the U.S. adopted the Common Core State Standards for Language Arts and Math. According to the NPR article, “The Common Core FAQ”, (2014), the CCSS were “the largest-ever attempt in the United States to set unified expectations for what students in kindergarten through 12th grade should know and be able to do in each grade in preparation for college and the workforce” (p. 1). Its purpose was essentially to create a standardized system by which to assess all students in the U.S., no matter what district they received their education through. While there is still great contention as to the effectiveness or appropriateness of these wide-reaching changes, many have noted that it was a decidedly rigorous and all-encompassing shift from anything that came before it (“The Common Core FAQ”, 2014).

A new emphasis on writing. One of the most prominent changes had specifically to do with a new and rigorous emphasis on writing. According to Graham and Harris (2013),

For the 45 states that adopted CCSS, writing is now a central player in their efforts to improve education. Students in these states (approximately 87 percent of all public school students in the United States) must now learn to craft text that skillfully persuade, inform, and narrate imagined or real experiences. (p. 28)

While few would argue that this shift wasn’t a much needed and incredibly important one (“admirable and timely,” according to Woodard and Kline (2016, p. 207), it has yet to change the fact that writing still is hardly being taught in the schools of the nation

(Goldstein, 2017). However, it was a starting point. While these standards do not dictate to teachers *how* they are to teach writing, it did provide a robust and sequential guide which would “provide an orderly progression for thinking about what students need to acquire at each grade level” (Graham & Harris, 2013, p. 29).

Regardless of what changes take place in regards to academic standards, it is no secret that, traditionally, students tend to strongly dislike writing – and this seems especially true as they grow older (Golub, 1971). According to Calkins (1994), “When our students resist writing, it’s usually because writing has been treated as little more than a place to display – to expose – their command of spelling, penmanship, and grammar” (p. 13). These new standards, and what they aim to achieve, are a far cry from the basic and dry mechanics of writing. Those things are still highlighted, of course, but they are no longer the factors that are being emphasized in the classroom (Graham & Harris, 2013). There is a distinctly dramatic shift towards more nuanced aspects of the subject, such as the Writing Process, exploring more types of genres and styles, and working through both short and lengthy writing projects (Graham & Harris, 2013). The bottom line, according to Goldstein (2017), is that “Many educators are concerned less with sentence-level mechanics than with helping students draw inspiration from their own lives and from literature” (p. 4).

Specifically, in elementary school classrooms, what other kinds of changes in writing expectations have been taking place? According to Wang and Matsumura (2018),

Traditionally, writing in the younger grades almost exclusively involved narrative forms and personal experiences (i.e., short stories, opinions); students were rarely required to write about what they read. (p. 2).

After the adoption of the CCSS, though, the standards were now “increasingly emphasizing students’ ability to respond analytically to texts as a core competency for college and career readiness.” (Wang & Matsumura, 2018, p. 2).

When it all comes down to it, according to Graham and Harris (2013), the Common Core State Standards highlight four important “applications of writing skills”:

(1) learning to write for multiple purposes (Text Types and Purposes); (2) producing and publishing well organized text appropriate to task and purpose by planning, revising, editing, and collaborating with others (Production and Distribution of Writing); (3) using writing to recall, organize, analyze, interpret, and build knowledge about a topic or materials read (Research to Build and Present Knowledge); and (4) applying both extended and shorter writing tasks to facilitate learning in a range of discipline-specific subjects and across purposes and audiences. (p. 28)

All of these factors should not be considered separate, but are in fact meant to be interwoven with one another. “These skills make it possible for the writer to transcribe, sculpt, and convey their meanings and intentions,” regardless of the task at hand or the prompt (Graham & Harris, 2013, p. 28).

Furthermore, according to Graham and Harris (2013), one of the most significant aspects of Common Core is “that there is considerable emphasis on teaching students

how to be better writers and how to use writing to enhance comprehension of text and facilitate learning of content materials” (p. 29). It is of the utmost importance to note that when students are writing about what they are learning, regardless of the subject area or the purpose of the composition, their knowledge and understanding are significantly enhanced (Graham & Harris, 2013).

To be sure, this all involves a substantial amount of higher expectations for all students and educators (Graham & Harris, 2013). The adoption and implementation of these rigorous standards were an important move in the right direction; at least in theory. After all, the ability to communicate through the written word has never been so important as it is right now. The CCSS emphasizes the Writing Process, collaboration and the necessary inclusion of high-quality features (such as organization and structure, content-specific terminology, and the use of examples), all of which contribute to the strengthening of writing abilities (English Language Arts Standards » Writing, 2009). Obviously, one must acquire these skills in order to perform well and graduate from the K-12 system.

If everything has gone according to plan, that student should be prepared to move on to college and will continue to utilize and perfect these skills. For starters, one must write well and convey their ideas in a meaningful way simply to get into a university. And once there, that high-quality writing will be absolutely required in order to complete any college program successfully (Troia et al., 2015).

Writing in the real-world. Of course, the skills are evermore necessary once that person transitions from academia into the real-world. At the very least, “writing serves as

a gateway to employment and promotion”, not to mention all that is required of the modern worker. Furthermore, it must be acknowledged that for every one of the above-mentioned requirements of the modern citizen, the importance of all of these skills will only become more essential as time progresses (Troia et al., 2015, p. 292).

It also goes without saying that the ability to communicate with the written word is also highly-required socially and civically in the modern age (Troia et al., 2015). With the prevalence of mobile devices and social media, much of the communication taking place is in written form. According to Tehranian (2013),

In the United States in the 21st century, children and adolescents spend more time looking at screens than they do anything else besides sleeping; even young children, from 0- to 8-years, spend a significant amount of time using digital technology. (p. 10)

Nearly all of this digital communication requires writing, in one form or another, even if it is in jargon or short-hand. The bottom line is that, no matter the context, one must still somehow convey one’s meaning with their written words.

Even though the information was collected in 2015 (at the most, a mere 5 years after the CCSS were implemented), the following data should be of great concern for not only educators, but policy makers and the general public as a whole:

Despite its importance for success as a lifelong learner and productive citizen, a large segment of the population struggles with writing: nearly three-quarters of the nation’s children and youth are not able to produce texts that are judged to fully meet grade-level expectations. Likewise, nearly a third of high school

graduates are not ready for college-level composition courses and three-quarters of college faculty and employers rate their students' and employees' writing, respectively, as only fair or poor. (Troia et al., 2015, p. 292)

Many would agree that this new emphasis on writing in the standards is a positive shift in getting students ready for their perspective college and career experiences. But Woodard and Kline (2016) expressed worry that the “role of context” is a missing piece of the equation (and by this, they mean “the recognition that writing is not just a cognitive process but a social and cultural one. Writing and writers develop through interactions with one another over time.” (p. 207).

Aside from focusing heavily on analyzing and writing about what they are reading and taking in, there is also enormous attention given to argumentative essays. Many experts and researchers would agree that argumentative writing is critical in getting students to begin to grasp the perspectives of others whom they may disagree with (Woodard & Kline, 2016). However, Woodard and Kline pointed out that “when we start to equate the ability to write a particular style of argument with high- quality thinking, we assume that all students are socialized into this style of thinking and ignore” the vast differences in culture and perspective (2016, p. 208). They suggested that students need to become “real-world writers” and educators need to underscore “real- world writing purposes”: to express and reflect, inform and explain, evaluate and judge, inquire and explore, analyze and interpret, take a stand and propose a solution” (Woodard & Kline, 2016, p. 210). To the point: Students need to be writing authentically and with real purpose.

However, given that the CCSS do not actually dictate *how* the standards are to be taught, that the choice to focus on all of these above-mentioned skills rests on the capable shoulders of educators (Graham & Harris, 2013). These standards do aim high and ask a lot of students, even in the lower grades. But if students are properly motivated and deliberately taught meaningful techniques and strategies, they will be fully capable of reaching these lofty goals. And in doing so, they will be significantly more prepared to step out into the real-world and apply these important and crucial skills to better themselves and the world in which they inhabit.

Why then, despite these important strides in the right direction regarding academic standards and making students college-and-career ready, are so many districts, schools, and teachers having such a hard time implementing them?

Concerns and Issues Facing Teachers of Writing

When it comes to the challenges of adopting and implementing meaningful writing instruction into the classroom, there are more than this paper can cover. But throughout the research, three recurring ideas seem to continuously stand in the way of giving writing its proper due: 1) a lack of time, especially considering the already heavy emphasis on other content areas; 2) the dire need for more research on what works when it comes to writing instruction; and 3) the fact that the vast majority of teachers are neither properly trained in how to teach writing, nor are they confident that they can successfully incorporate it in their classrooms.

Lack of time for writing instruction. Of course, what with the obvious focus in today's schools on reading, mathematics, and standardized testing, to emphasize these

complex writing skills as well can be overwhelming for the already-overworked teacher (not to mention everything else that is required of the modern educator in the U.S.). With the implementation of these new, demanding standards for writing it is no wonder that according to Coker, Jennings, Farley-Ripple, and MacArthur (2018) through surveyed and observational research, it had been noted that fairly little writing instruction was taking place in the classrooms that they studied, and what was taking place varied widely from teacher to teacher.

Regarding those vast variations, it would appear that writing instruction tends to come in two forms: Traditional and the Workshop methods. Traditional methods often utilize textbooks and worksheets, and focuses mostly on mechanics, conventions, and basic skills. It is very teacher-centric, where students have very little choice or autonomy in what they write about, and their audience is typically reserved to one: the teacher (McCarthy & Yeon Sun, 2011). Not only is this type of work unauthentic, interestingly enough, it must also be noted that “research indicates isolated grammar instruction has been found to have no effect or possibly a negligible effect on students’ writing,” (Brindley & Schneider, 2002, p. 330).

The workshop model, however, personified in the works of Lucy Calkins (2013), emphasizes the variety of stages of the Writing Process (such as idea generation, free-writing/flash drafting, organizing/mapping, and eventually drafting, revising/editing, and finally, publication). It is heavy on modeling - where the teacher will even show examples of their own work – as well as collaboration (McCarthy, Woodard, & Kang,

2016). And there is also significant highlighting of the finished product: writers share and celebrate the completion of their work at the end of any given project (Calkins, 1994).

Writing Workshop is ambitious (Calkins, 1994). The curricula are heavy, dense, complex and nuanced. Lessons take significant time and energy for teachers to study, unpack and plan for. The aim is to make writing authentic and purpose-driven – which, alone, can be intimidating. Many educators shy away from it due to the amount of time and effort it takes simply to set a lesson up, not to mention the individual conferencing involved as teachers help students shape and revise their pieces (Calkins, 1994). For many, it is just too much, on top of everything else that goes on in a classroom on a given day.

Later in this chapter, there will be a more thorough examination of the workshop methodology.

More research on writing is required. What research exists, done by the experts on the subject, makes it abundantly clear: there are direct correlations between success and growth in writing, and improved reading abilities, as well as stronger, more meaningful understanding of any given content area (Graham & Harris, 2013). In fact, the Common Core standards concerning writing aim to boost competency with the skill by writing with intended purpose (such as analyzing a text and writing about it, which forces the student to grasp a deeper understanding of what was read) (CCSS, 2018).

Yet despite the incredible importance of explicit writing instruction, there is remarkably little research regarding what actually works for teachers in their goals of getting their students proficient with these skills (Goldstein, 2017).

This is especially true when it comes to understanding how writing skills develop, implementing evidence-based professional development for writing teachers, and assessing what writing strategies actually work for progressing student skills (Graham & Harris, 2013). Unfortunately, federal funding for this type of research tends to be allocated elsewhere (usually to reading or mathematics) (Graham, & Harris 2013). It is clear that all of these skills and content areas tend to be interconnected (Graham & Harris, 2013). It, therefore, makes it particularly unfortunate that some subjects are often shown preference over others (McCarthy & Yeon Sun, 2011).

On top of this lack of research on writing instruction, and despite the Common Core standards bringing these skills to the forefront of the conversation, there has been, historically, a disturbing lack of quality writing curriculum actually available to schools and districts (Florio & Clark, 1982). Perhaps all of this has to do with what the fact that there still simply is not “comprehensive policy on writing” across the U.S. (McCarthy & Yeon Sun, 2011, p. 273). All of these factors undoubtedly play a critical role in the last concern that will be discussed here.

Lack of teacher training in writing. Finally, and perhaps more importantly, it is clear that “teachers have little training in how to teach writing and are often weak or unconfident writers themselves.” (Goldstein, 2017, p. 12). Furthermore,

According to Kate Walsh, president of the National Council on Teacher Quality, a scan of course syllabuses from 2,400 teacher preparation programs turned up little evidence that the teaching of writing was being covered in a widespread or systematic way. (Goldstein, 2017, p. 13)

As stated earlier, to effectively teach meaningful writing skills, significant and complex work is involved. It takes a tremendous amount of time and energy to plan and implement solid writing lessons (often involving writing one's own examples to model for students), as well as when it comes to assisting struggling writers and conferencing with every student and their pieces (Calkins, 1994). Not only that, but writing is challenging work in and of itself, especially when one is first learning how to effectively do it, requiring tremendous amount of cognitive processes. Graham and Harris (2013) claimed that

Writers must master and juggle a commanding array of skills, knowledge, and processes. This includes strategies for planning, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing text; knowledge about topic and genre; and the skills needed to craft and transcribe ideas into sentences that convey the author's intended meaning. (p. 32)

Given the complexity of these skills, and the overarching importance of acquiring them – as has been thoroughly noted throughout this chapter – it is seemingly incomprehensible that there is such a lack of rigorous research being done on what works in terms of writing instruction or programs that educate teachers on how to effectively teach it in their classrooms (Goldstein, 2017).

Not only are teachers not being adequately trained to teach writing, one must also consider the fact that they themselves have gone through an educational system that did a poor job at teaching them this important skill when they were young. Therefore, it is no wonder that many professional educators do not feel confident with their own writing

abilities, much less with their skills to impart the knowledge onto their students (Graham & Harris, 2013).

Though these three factors (lack of time, lack of research, and lack of training) only scratch the surface of the issues that make it a challenge for teachers to incorporate rigorous and explicit writing instruction in their classrooms, after thoroughly researching the subject, these were the most prominent themes that continuously appeared. Luckily, however, there are a number of inspiring solutions that aim to address the above-mentioned problems. Through carefully crafted curricula, educators can effectively teach the important skills involved with communicating meaningfully through the written word, meet the Common Core State Standards, utilize these abilities to succeed in life and motivate all students to do so.

Possible Solutions

Not only do students struggle with their writing, both in the classroom and in the real world, but it has been noted that they tend not to care for it much either (Goldstein, 2017). So how can teachers get their students interested and excited to participate in the crucial act of writing? And once they do have that motivation, what can educators do to encourage sophisticated, well-rounded, and authentic work from their students? Here, the *Writing Process* will be examined. This section aims to get at the heart of the question I've asked to guide this entire project: *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students' writing skills using the workshop model?*

Motivation. Simply put, according to Hayes and Olinghouse (2015), "Without the motive to write, writing will not happen" (p. 482). Students need to be inspired. They

need to know that their writing serves a purpose. They need to see themselves as writers (Calkins, 1994). What follows is an examination of five important factors that can lead to gaining that ever-sought-after buy-in from one's classroom: modeling, student choice, applicability, authenticity and sharing.

When it comes to education, few factors can be more effective, and yet so simple, as modeling. Many schools and behavioral management philosophies emphasize modeling in all respects. It is how young children, and anyone else for that matter, learn best: Seeing the desired behaviors, skills, or ideas in action by someone who is competent with them (Anderson, 2015). Again, this is often focused on showing students how to properly conduct themselves in a classroom, behaviorally. But many would argue that modeling can be equally important and effective when it comes to academic work as well (Calkins, 1994). To be successful writers, children not only need to have plenty of opportunities to write, but they also need to be regularly exposed to high-quality writing (McCarthy, Woodard, & Kang, 2013).

Given the lofty aims and expectations of the CCSS and the high-level thinking required to meet those challenges, students benefit most when they see examples of what a finished writing piece should look like for a given prompt. Not only does it benefit students to see exemplar work (which can also include student work as well), but when they see their teacher doing that work too, it is an incredible motivator (Wang & Matsumura, 2018). It is ideal for students to see themselves, their peers and their teachers as authentic writers (Calkins, 1994).

Modeling can be a powerful motivator and wonderfully effective, regardless of what discipline or task it is being demonstrated in (McCarthy, Woodard & Kang, 2013). An educator demonstrating and referencing their own work in the course of a writing lesson can be quite inspiring for students. They see the teacher struggle with the same things that they themselves may be struggling with; they witness the teacher make mistakes along the way and then use those mistakes to better their piece and their understanding; and they get a window into what it looks like and feels like to be a legitimate writer (Calkins, 1994; McCarthy, Woodard & Kang, 2013).

Another important factor when it comes to increasing motivation for writing in the classroom is another one that can be effective in all subject areas and aspects of a school day: student choice and autonomy. It was well known that to get that much-needed student buy-in during instruction, giving children a choice in what they do is highly motivating and effective (Brindley & Schneider, 2002). It has been thoroughly noted so far in this paper that writing *is* challenging work. Why make it more even more challenging by removing a child's options from the situation?

It is often said that to be a strong, meaningful author, one must "write what they know". So why shouldn't that apply to the classroom as well? Students tend to feel more invested in their work when they write about themselves, their experiences, what they're interested in and excited about, and *what they know* (Calkins, 1994).

Having choice is important to a child – or anyone, for that matter. Being able to have a say in what they work on, what they research, what they invest in and what they write about is critical for success. Forcing students to do all of that work for something

that is beyond unimportant to them is setting them up for failure. Letting them make that choice themselves is always a step in the right direction (Calkins, 1994).

This leads us to the next factors, two interconnected elements that are incredibly important for effective writing instruction: applicability and authenticity. It is of the highest importance to make the work done in the classroom to be actually applicable to the real world – otherwise, what’s the point?

When one writes something, it must be for a purpose – a purpose other than a grade. We write for countless reasons: to tell stories, to connect to others and share experiences, to remind ourselves and others of important things, to inform, convince, correct, and most importantly, to communicate (Calkins, 1994; McCarthey, Woodard & Kang, 2013).

Many researchers have found that there can be great importance in developing a mastery of the argumentative essay (Calkins, 1994; Calkins, 2013; McCarthey, Woodard & Kang, 2013; Woodard & Kline, 2016). Not only that, but there is a large emphasis in the Common Core Standards on this type of writing. Woodard and Kline (2016) claimed that “argumentation helps students understand differing perspectives” and is an absolutely “necessary skill for democratic participation” (p. 208). In this modern age, few qualities seem to require more attention than these two interconnected ideas of applicability and authenticity.

The Writing Process. Worksheets and textbooks are not authentic. However, what is authentic is the *Writing Process*. It has been argued that simply sitting down, writing what one needs to say, and calling it done when the last word is written is not

how people actually write. There are many steps involved, regardless of the task or prompt at hand (Calkins, 1994).

When it comes to writing informational texts (i.e. nonfiction, research papers), Calkins (2013) suggested that there are somewhere around 5 steps involved before a writer even begins to draft their piece. These include, but are not limited to, choosing a topic, thinking about what kind of writing will be done and structure it accordingly, planning ways to take notes and list out ideas, collecting those notes, and devising a strategy to teach others what has been learned and using this plan to prepare for how it will actually be presented in written form. Finally, when all that planning, organizing and information-gathering is complete, that's when the author sits down to draft. Yes, it is a lot of work, but so is writing itself. Carefully laying out steps and structures to this complicated process (especially in the beginning) can do wonders to relieve the intense pressure students tend to feel when faced with the blank page (Calkins, 1994).

But of course, the Writing Process does not stop there. There are many other useful techniques that educators can use to help student gets started. Free-writing and flash-drafting are very effective when it comes to getting started – students are often amazed at what they come up with and produce when not faced with the narrow confines of, for example, a research paper. It is a way to show oneself what brilliant information is really in one's mind (Calkins, 2013).

Once the draft has been completed, then the meaningful work of editing (focused on mechanics) and revision (adding, cutting, rearranging and restructuring) begins. This may put a single piece through a variety of different drafts (Calkins, 1994).

This, finally, brings us to perhaps the most important factor of making writing instruction meaningful, inspiring, motivating and authentic for students: sharing that hard work with others in a finished, polished and published piece. All writing must have an intended purpose, and one that is beyond receiving a grade or points (McCarthy, Woodard, & Kang, 2013). We write to share our thoughts and words with the world and ourselves – otherwise, why go through the trouble at all?

Students need to know that there is something more significant to all of that written work than simply having their teacher read it once and giving them a score. With all of the time, effort, and energy a writer puts into their piece, somehow celebrating that impressive accomplishment and sharing that work with others is of the utmost importance if we want students who are engaged in the laborious process (Calkins, 2013).

Contrary to what many may believe, writing not the solitary, isolated activity that often comes to mind when we think of the author at work. “Fundamentally, writing is a social activity involving an implicit or explicit dialogue between writer and reader (the writer is also a reader of his/her work)” (Graham & Harris, 2013, p. 32).

Furthermore, aside from sharing that finished piece with others, effective writing instruction can heavily incorporate the idea of collaboration. Students should be bouncing ideas off of one another; they should be getting meaningful feedback from their teacher as well as their peers throughout the Writing Process (not just at the end); and they can be sharing their brilliant thoughts to inspire those around them (Baker, 2017).

However, it must be noted that the workshop is not without its concerns. Many claim that with this emphasis on process can unfortunately devolve into a “rigid sequence

of pre-writing, writing, and revision,” or that this kind of high-level focus leaves many students behind and what they really require is “more guided practice,” and more emphasis on the fundamental components and mechanics of writing (McCarthy & Yeon Sun, 2011, p. 275).

Although there is not as much research as there could be regarding what works when it comes to writing instruction, these above-mentioned factors are an optimistic starting point. All five of these supportive motivators – that is, modeling, student choice, applicability, authenticity and sharing – are the fundamental elements of what goes into the workshop methodology. As has been demonstrated throughout this chapter, and as the name ‘workshop’ implies, this is not a cut-and-dry formula for instruction. Rather, it is complex and nuanced, requiring significant effort on the part of both the students and the teacher as they all embark on the multi-faceted Writing Process together. It is, however, worth the effort. After all, “The purpose of writer’s workshop is for students to think of themselves as authors” (Baker, 2013, p. 30). Beyond that, studies have found that, on the whole, “students in a writer’s workshop environment wrote longer, more complex texts than students in a skills-based classroom who wrote in workbooks and did fill-in-the-blank activities” (McCarthy & Yeon Sun, 2011, p. 276).

If educators are to meet the needs of the modern student, and the academic standards by which they are judged, then the writing workshop model will be absolutely necessary. This is especially true if one is to consider the alternative: the traditional methods of writing instruction. But the days in which those strategies were effective (if they ever were) are long gone.

Rationale

It has long been my belief, and the sources clearly back me up on this, that deliberate writing instruction, specifically implemented with the workshop method, is critical to student success, both in the classroom and in the real world. The required rigor involved in such a curriculum lines up well with the Common Core standards for writing (Calkins, 2013).

Much of the focus on those standards seems to be around argumentative/ persuasive writing – a fact that I am very appreciative of. As has been noted earlier in this chapter, this type of writing forces students to be aware of counter arguments to their own beliefs and to be more understanding of those who have differing perspectives than they themselves do (Woodard & Kline, 2016). Not only that, but this type of writing also makes it absolutely necessary for writers to support their claims and arguments with solid evidence as well (Calkins, 2013). I believe that by training students to think this way, we are adding an integral component of creating a more understanding, open-minded, and informed society. All of these things are critical to a successful and healthy democratic system. And wasn't that the intended purpose of establishing a public education system in the U.S. to begin with?

A fundamental component of my own, personal educational philosophy is that everything done in the classroom must be authentic and applicable. If we are teaching concepts and skills that cannot be directly applied in the real-world, we are wasting precious time. Not only is it of the utmost importance to make classwork connected to what students will need to be successful in life, but kids can tell the difference too. It has

been my observation that they can tell when they are given mere busy-work and when what they are doing is authentic – they demonstrate it with their level of motivation.

I strongly believe that if students are deliberately being taught via the workshop model on how to write, utilizing the Writing Process, and are being motivated to do so, they can all meet the Common Core standards. But more importantly, they will have gained critical skills and knowledge that will lead them to being successful, informed and engaged citizens.

Summary

With the creation of the Common Core State Standards, the majority of the states in the U.S. adopted and began implementing them in their schools. With this change in policy, there was a new, highlighted emphasis placed on writing that had rarely ever been focused on before. There was a decided shift away from the basic mechanics and a new focus on more complex demands, higher-level thinking and the requirement of rigorous, process-oriented work. There has been a distancing away from worksheets and the like and a push towards the Writing Process and in-depth study of the art of writing (Bradford, Newland, Rule & Montgomery, 2015).

With these many dramatic changes, there have been plenty of challenges on the part of both educators, as well as their students. The reasons are many. Among them, is the fact that there is already such a massive emphasis on mathematics and reading, not to mention the already lofty demands of today's highly-accountable field of education. And considering that writing is a relatively new focus, there is a notable lack of research done on evidence-based instructional practices (Graham & Harris, 2013). And perhaps the

most glaring issue of all is that educators are not being trained or taught *how* to best teach writing in their classrooms (Goldstein, 2017).

But there is, in fact, a bit of good news as well. There are a variety of practices that have been shown to be very effective in getting students both motivated and skilled when it comes to their writing. Modeling, student choice, applicability, authenticity, and sharing, all being a part of the workshop philosophy, do wonders at getting children to buy into these challenging demands and to even excel with them (Calkins, 1994). All of these things certainly do get to the heart of the guiding question of this paper of *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students' writing skills using the workshop model?*

One of the primary purposes of adopting the CCSS was to ensure that students leave their K-12 education with the proper skills they will need to thrive in the modern world, one in which our country will need to do everything it can to be globally competitive (Troia et al., 2015). I believe, and the research tends to agree with me, that the best way to do that (and to meet the Common Core standards) is to emphasize writing instruction and to adopt the workshop model in classrooms across the country (Baker, 2013; Calkins, 1994; Goldstein, 2017; Graham & Harris, 2013; McCarthy, Woodard, & Kang, 2013; McCarthy & Yeon Sun, 2011; Troia et al., 2015; Woodard & Kline, 2016). Not only does it make for stronger, more capable writers, but I believe it allows for students – and teachers – to be more motivated and inspired by the art of writing.

In the following chapter, I will discuss and layout the details of how I have gone about answering my guiding question of *How can fourth grade educators increase*

student motivation to write and strengthen students' writing skills using the workshop model? I will present the research paradigm that I adopted, the context of the study itself, and the methods that I used to conduct my project.

CHAPTER THREE

Methods

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methods that were used throughout the course of this research project as I attempted to answer the guiding question of this paper: *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students' writing skills using the workshop model?* It has been my assessment and belief that the best way to motivate students to write, as well as to enhance their skills within the discipline is to utilize an authentic workshop-based curriculum, where deliberate writing instruction takes place routinely in the classroom.

First, I present the paradigms by which this study was conducted. By utilizing a pragmatic, mixed-methods approach, I believe the data collected to be overwhelmingly relevant to a real-world application (Creswell, 2014). Next, I will present the varying aspects of the context this research was done within; that is, the student demographics, both in the school as a whole, as well as within my classroom in particular. I will also present a thorough explanation of the school setting and the timeline the research occurred within. Finally, I will present the types of tools I used in my mixed methods approach to this research and the means by which I analyzed the collected data, as well as

the details regarding the ethical considerations that were taken during the course of this study.

By presenting all of the relevant information pertaining to the paradigm through which this study was conducted, the context that it took place in, the methods utilized, and the way in which the collected data was analyzed, I hope to inform the reader of all of the necessary background information required to understand the importance of this project and to show that it was done within the most stringent and safe parameters possible.

Research Paradigm

The methods used in this study fall into the category of the pragmatic paradigm (Creswell, 2014). I used this study to show how deliberate writing instruction can have a profoundly positive impact on students as they work their way through the education system and continue on to be contributing members of a democratic society (Creswell, 2014). The skills students gain in a workshop approach to writing instruction are of the highest importance to a fully-functioning democratic system, one in which citizens are engaged and informed, and can communicate their thoughts and ideas in a way that can benefit their communities. Considering that three quarters of U.S. students are not fully meeting the Common Core writing standards, I believe that this is something we need to be investing in significantly more if we hope to adequately prepare children for the future that they will be inheriting (Troia et al., 2015).

Research methods. While the majority of the means by which I researched this study can be categorized as qualitative, I also utilized some quantitative means as well.

Therefore, this study followed a mixed-methods approach (Mills, 2018). Concerning the qualitative methods, I utilized the following tools: observation (as an active participant), taking regularly scheduled field notes of all of the participating students during their writing work time, as well as conducting formal one-on-one interviews with a focus group of four students three times throughout the study. There was also a regular use of questionnaires (the Student Interest Surveys, found in Appendix D). As for the quantitative tools, I implemented attitude scales (the Student Writing Instruction Surveys, found in Appendix E) (Mills, 2018). Both surveys were distributed simultaneously, three times throughout the course of the study.

I chose these varying methods as a way of gauging interest, enthusiasm, and motivation for writing, determining if any of it had a correlation with the students' ability to meet the standards, and to judge whether or not these things increased over the course of an authentic and rigorous writing unit.

When it came to the Student Interest Surveys and the Writing Instruction Surveys, I distributed them at different points in the given unit (prior to beginning the unit, mid-way through the unit which was after lesson 11, and once the unit was finished and students have submitted their final pieces) to see how attitudes, interests, and confidence changed and evolved. I also conducted interviews with the focus group three times during this unit as well. These one-one-one interviews with each participating student took place after lesson 6 (which was nearing the completion of their first of two books they wrote), after lesson 20 (which was close to the completion of their second of the two books they wrote), and finally, one last time after they had completed and submitted that second

book (see Appendix G for the interview template that I used each time). I also performed observations (as an active participant observer), taking field notes at five separate intervals: during lessons 1, 5, 10, 15, and 20) (see Appendix F for the Observation/Field Notes template that I used for these).

Finally, I collected artifacts in the form of student writing – both of the books that they wrote over the course of this unit. Much of this data that was collected was based on the rubrics that I created and the students' accompanying grades which they received (see Appendix B for the rubric for book one and Appendix C for the rubric for book 2).

The purpose of these varying data-collection tools was to assess how students felt about writing instruction and to note if their skill-level increased over the course of the given unit. When it is a focus of their daily routine and they are exposed to authentic, workshop-based instruction, does their motivation increase over time? And does their competency with the necessary skills increase as they practice these ideas on a routine basis?

By using a variety of tools and techniques at varying stages of this study, I hoped to triangulate the data in a way that would be useful, relevant, and applicable to the body of work regarding the importance of writing instruction in the education system (Mills, 2018).

Research Context

Setting. For this project, I focused on my own class (information below). But it will also be important to understand the type of educational environment this study took place in.

The school within which I administered this research project is a small charter school in Minneapolis. It was established about 15 years ago and currently houses grades between kindergarten and 8th grade. The main focus of the school is to provide social-emotional learning to the student body. As far as writing curriculum goes, Lucy Calkins's *Unit of Study* (2013) has been implemented in all classrooms for 4 years. The school has been studying and applying varying aspects of the workshop philosophy for the entire time it has existed though.

The most recent demographic data (Minnesota Report Card, 2019) stated that there are a little over 300 students all together (which also includes the middle school), with about 32% qualifying for free or reduced lunch, approximately 6% being English Language Learners, and about 12% of students qualifying for special education. Of the student population, 57% are White, 23% are African-American, 9% are Hispanic, .7% are American Indian, and 2% are Asian.

Of the ten elementary classroom teachers, all are White. Three are male, and seven are female. Among them, three have been licensed educators for more than five years.

Participants. The research in this project took place in my 4th grade classroom. Most of these students had been exposed to the *Units of Study* curriculum throughout their educational experiences (up to four years before being in my class) and so they have been practicing these skills for quite some time and were thoroughly familiar with the structure of the lessons and the expectations of the work involved.

I chose to focus on my class for the above-mentioned reasons, as well as the fact that they were the group of students that I was most familiar with and had been working with closest. Being that I have thoroughly studied, invested in, focused on and successfully implemented this 4th grade edition of the curriculum in the previous year, I felt that I was a confident and enthusiastic implementor for what was required of this study.

There were 14 students from my class of 18 that participated in the study. All of them live in Minneapolis or the surrounding areas. Seven of them are White; three are Hispanic; two are African-American; and two are Asian.

Timeline. The research I implemented took place over the course of a single unit of the *Units of Study* (2013) writer's workshop curriculum. This was the third unit, *Bringing History to Life* (2013). The duration of this unit lasted approximately 9 weeks (the end of February 2019 to the beginning of May 2019). The class filled out questionnaires and attitudes scale surveys before the unit began, halfway through the unit (after lesson 11), and after finishing the unit (lesson 23).

Methods and Data Analysis

Before any of the research began, I randomly selected 4 students with which to focus on in regards to growth, both in their motivation and their skill level. I divided up the class into three ability levels: lower, mid-range, and high. I randomly select 1 student from the lower level, 2 from the mid-range, and one from the high level. I conducted interviews with these four students three times throughout the unit and research project (after lessons 6, 20, and when the unit was complete), and also examined their produced

work as they progressed through the unit. I used this data in conjunction with the information gathered from the general classroom (those participating), as a means by which to triangulate all acquired data (Mills, 2018).

Pre-unit surveys. Before the writing unit that we used actually began, I distributed both the Student Interest Survey, as well as the Writing Instruction Survey to the class. These surveys remained anonymous. Considering that this was the third unit of writing the class and I had gone through together (but the second non-fiction writing unit), I believe that this was an accurate assessment of where their feelings and interests were at before I began to implement the rigorous and focus-driven writing unit with them.

Mid-unit surveys. At about halfway through the unit (after lesson 11), I distributed the same Student Interest and Writing Instruction Surveys to the class. I used these to assess whether or not my explicit focus and emphasis on writing instruction had any kind of effect on their interest/motivation level, or their skill-level. Once more, these all remained anonymous.

Post-unit surveys. Once the unit was complete and students had submitted their final, published drafts of both of their books, I then distributed the same Student Interest and Writing Instruction Surveys to them. The purpose of this was to ascertain the growth of both student motivation to perform this type of work, as well as their interest and skill-level with it. All surveys continued to remain anonymous.

Focus group interviews and artifacts. During the course of this unit and research project, as I administer the above-mentioned surveys, I also allowed time to

engage in one-on-one interviews with my randomly-selected control group of four. These acted as a sort-of check-in at the different stages of the process with these students, seeing how things were going, what they had been successful with, and where they might be struggling. My aim was that this focus group was to act as an indicative sample of the class as a whole. I conducted and video recorded the interviews (utilizing the interview template found in Appendix G) three times throughout the course of the project. These interviews specifically occurred after lesson 6, after lesson 20, and after the completion of the unit (when students had submitted their final drafts). This also involved observing and analyzing their work at every stage of the Writing Process (idea generation, organizing the structure, taking notes, teaching others, drafting, revising, editing, finalizing and publishing) (Calkins, 2013).

Observations. Throughout the unit and research project, I also frequently took field notes while observing all of the participating students in the classroom (based on the Observation/Field Notes template found on Appendix F). These observations occurred after the mini-lesson had been taught and during their writing work time. I implemented these observations during lessons 1, 5, 10, 15, and 20. My aim was to “look for nothing in particular”, in hopes of observing something I had not anticipated, or the “bumps” in the research (Mills, 2018, p. 116). I have found that by simply observing without expectations or biases, remarkable information often unfolds in the most fascinating ways. Having specific insights into the entire Writing Process for specific students allowed for profound insights into the effectiveness of the workshop model.

Data analysis. Much of the class-wide data that was collected came in the form of the two surveys. Most of the questions were fairly open-ended and required short answers, and many of the other questions asked the participants to record their opinions/feelings on a given prompt on a zero to ten scale. Zero indicated a negative or irrelevant response, while ten demonstrated the highest positive interest, with the numbers between representing the remainder of the spectrum.

Once the surveys had all been collected, I began to organize them in varying ways, noting trends that stood out, as well as any outlier information.

As far as the focus group's responses went, I compared and contrasted their responses throughout all of the interviews (both their own and compared to the other focus group participants). I also analyzed their responses and compared them with their finished writing products to indicate whether their levels of interest/motivation correlated with their proficiency in their writing abilities.

I also compared all of this data with my field notes and the information collected through all of the students' writing work.

Ethics. Given the incredible importance of maintaining the safety and ethics in a study of this nature, significant effort was put forth to ensure all relevant guidelines were followed to the highest degree (Mills, 2018). Considering that the focus of this study was concerned with 4th grade children, before any data collection began, I completed the Hamline University Institutional Review Board (IRB) training, which emphasizes how researchers can protect the rights and safety of any human subjects involved. This study qualified as an Exempt Review Protocol, and required a training video, assessments on

the relevant knowledge, and the filling out of a number of applications and forms. One of these, the Hamline University approved Informed Consent to Participate in Research form (see Appendix H), was later sent home to every family whose child would have potentially been involved in this project (the entire class). These parents/guardians absolutely had the option of declining to have their child have any involvement in the study, with no adverse repercussions. The four randomly-selected students that were involved in the focus group were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality, while all other students remained strictly anonymous. All participants had the right to exit the study at any time, with no repercussions (Mills, 2018).

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to establish the means by which I implemented my action research plan in my classroom in an effort to answer the guiding question of *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students' writing skills using the workshop model?*

By first laying out the fact that I conducted this study via a pragmatic paradigm, using a mixed-method strategy, I hoped to convey to the reader the lens through which this project was viewed through by me. I then presented a thorough background of both the school that the study took place in, as well as the specifics regarding my classroom's population, where the vast majority of the data collected occurred. Finally, I presented the means by which I actually performed my research in my classroom and how I planned on analyzing the collected data, as well as the ethical considerations taken throughout this research. This has all been done in an effort to maintain the safety of all subjects, to

demonstrate the integrity of the project, and to ensure that the study will abide by Hamline's Human Subject Research guidelines.

In the following chapter, I will present the findings of the research. The data was analyzed and interpreted in an effort to answer my guiding question of *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students' writing skills using the workshop model?* The conclusions that are drawn will aim to demonstrate the importance of deliberate writing instruction in schools, as well as the inherent real-world applicability of the workshop method. They should increase both student motivation to write, as well as their ability to do so according to grade level standards.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Analysis and Results

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to share and analyze the data from the study that I have conducted in my classroom during the course of the *Units of Study* unit. All of this will be done, again, in an effort to answer the fundamental question guiding this project: *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students' writing skills using the workshop model?* While the research study went almost exactly as planned (this being an elementary school classroom however, and nothing ever goes precisely as it was originally intended to), there were a number of surprising and overwhelmingly positive trends presented throughout the data that supports my hypothesis.

To best fully understand the collected data, I will present it in a way that is both chronological as well as thematic. I will first discuss the results of the varying surveys that I distributed to the participants of the study: the Student Interests Surveys and the Writing Instruction Surveys. Again, these were distributed to all participants three times throughout the course of this study (before it began, in the middle of it, and once the unit was fully complete). Next, I will discuss the findings of the five lessons/work sessions that I explicitly observed/took field notes during. I will then move on to significantly

more focused data by taking an in-depth look at the results of the focus group. This will first involve a discussion of the interviews that I conducted with them (three times throughout the course of the unit), as well as an analysis of their relevant artifacts: both their first and second books, and a comparison of each in terms of demonstrating competency with the skills being assessed via the rubric. I focus particularly on growth (or a lack thereof) in their writing skills, as well as increased enthusiasm and motivation. Then I will discuss the results of the rest of the class's projects. I will then analyze the grades of the two books each student wrote, utilizing the mode and mean grades, and then I will again discuss the growth (or lack of it), based on my created rubrics for each assignment. Finally, I then show the connection of these rubrics to the Common Core State Standards that I utilized for the actual grading process and the trends that were demonstrated in their work.

Again, the main goal of this chapter is to display all of the significant data that has been collected throughout the course of this research study that I conducted in my fourth grade classroom. My hope is that the results (particularly in regards to student growth) will speak for themselves in proving that a workshop and explicit instruction based writing curriculum is the ideal way in which to both motivate students to write and to increase their proficiency with their writing skills.

Student Surveys

The logical place to begin in analyzing the data I have collected is with the student surveys. There are two of them: the Student Writing Interest Survey (Appendix D) and the Writing Instruction Survey (Appendix E). These were distributed together,

three times throughout the course of this project: before the unit began, midway through the unit (after lesson 11, which is after the first book was completed and three lessons into the second book), and finally, after the entire unit was wrapped up. It is important to note that the pre-unit surveys were distributed after completing our second unit of the 4th grade Writer's Workshop curriculum. That unit was my students' first introduction to essay writing and was not only a big step in their education, but an overarching theme of our 4th grade year together. All this is to say that although these surveys were given out before the actual unit/study began, by no means were they unfamiliar with the type of informational writing that they would soon be undertaking.

The purpose of the Student Writing Interest Survey was to gauge the participants' interest in writing throughout the course of this study as we made our way through the two book writing assignments - research projects concerning the American Revolution. The Writing Instruction Survey was designed to get an idea of how the participants felt about not only learning about writing in the classroom, but especially how they felt about the *Units of Study* curriculum.

To convey the collected results, I will first focus on the Student Writing Interest Survey. I discuss them in the order that they were distributed, noting trends that were unique to each. I will then look at the trends that spanned all three surveys, as well as any growth-based data collected. Next, I focus on the Writing Instruction Surveys. Again, I will first go through each of the three and then discuss overarching trends that were presented throughout all of them.

Student writing interest surveys. To begin with, it is important to note that most of the class has been going to our school for their entire educational careers (or very nearly the entirety). Nine of the fourteen participants of this survey have been at our school since Kindergarten – which means that they have been utilizing *Units of Study* most, if not all, of the time that they have studied writing in their lives. Some also said though, that despite only joining us this year, they have also used this curriculum at their previous schools.

On this first survey, as far as general writing interest is concerned on a scale of 0 to 10, no one surveyed indicated anything less than 5 (which also happened to be the mode-rating of this data). The mean level of interest here was 6.4, out of 10. When it comes to the type of writing students prefer, 9 out of the 14 were most partial to writing varying types of fiction. And as far as the type of writing students disliked the most, 6 out of the 14 claimed to really not like book reports (and only one said they did not care to write fiction – the rest disliked other varying types of informational/nonfiction writing).

On average, the entire class spent approximately 4 hours a week working on writing at school, but writing at home was another story. I do not assign homework in my class, but I always encourage students (particularly with this project) to do a bit of work outside of school, especially if they are not where they think they should be or happen to be inspired to do so. Five students claimed to never work at home, six said that they spent about an hour a week working on their writing outside of school, and three said they spent up to 2 hours doing that.

With the second survey, distributed about halfway through the study/unit, which was shortly after students had completed their first book, the results continued along similar trends. However, there were a number of items that appeared to be a bit skewed. This may be due to the fact that the class was in the midst of the project, rather than thinking about these things before it began or after it was complete. Regardless, the patterns continue along similar lines as the first did. Let it be noted that there were only 12 students participating in this survey (as two of the 14 were absent). Similar to the previous survey, with the exception of 1 student, everyone rated their general interest in writing above 5 (out of 10) – and that one student rated themselves at 4. However, 4 of the 12 rated their interest at 8 or above. While the mode was still 5, the mean-rating went up to 6.7. When it came to what type of writing students enjoyed most, the breakdowns can be found on Table 1, as follows:

Table 1

Types of Writing Students Enjoyed Most – Student Interest Survey 2

<u>TYPE OF WRITING</u>	<u>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE</u>
Fiction and Nonfiction	3/12	25%
Nonfiction	2/12	17%
Fiction	7/12	58%

As far as the types of writing students *disliked* the most, the results are on Table 2, as follows:

Table 2

Types of Writing Students Disliked Most – Student Interest Survey 2

<u>TYPE OF WRITING</u>	<u>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE</u>
Poetry	1/12	8%
Fiction	1/12	8%
Nonfiction	4/12	34%
Book Reports	6/12	50%

This time, when it came to the amount of time students spent outside of school working on their writing in a given week, the results were as follows: 1 spent no time writing at home; 5 said about a half an hour; 3 said one hour; 2 said two hours; and 1 claimed to spend as much as five hours. There is a clear uptick in the amount of time students were spending writing outside school at this midway point and that is probably due to the nature (and rigor) of the project itself.

When both book-projects were completed and the unit was wrapped up, the students took the third and final survey. For this round, there were 13 of the 14 students present. Once more, everyone rated their interest in writing at 5 or above (except for one student who indicated 4). The mode of this information was a rating of 9 (out of 10),

while the mean went up to 7.2. Once more, not much changed as far as students' writing preferences went, as shown on Table 3:

Table 3

Types of Writing Students Enjoyed Most – Student Interest Survey 3

<u>TYPE OF WRITING</u>	<u>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE</u>
Fiction and Nonfiction	2/13	15%
Nonfiction	2/13	15%
Fiction	9/13	69%

In terms of the type of writing students least liked, the data is as follows, on Table 4:

Table 4

Types of Writing Students Disliked Most – Student Interest Survey 3

<u>TYPE OF WRITING</u>	<u>NUMBER OF STUDENTS</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE</u>
Poetry	2/13	15%
Fiction	1/13	8%
Nonfiction	5/13	38%
Book Reports	5/13	38%

When it came to the number of hours participants spent outside of school each week working on their writing, there again were some interesting trends: 3 said they did not write outside of school at all; 6 said they wrote for at least one hour a week out of school; 3 said two hours; and 1 said they wrote for about 3 and a half hours a week.

Taken as a whole, there are some very interesting and positive trends to be gleaned from all of this data. First, there did not appear to be any direct correlation between the number of years a student has attended our school/utilized the *Units of Study* curriculum and their interest in writing. And again, aside from one student in both the second and third surveys, no one rated their interest level below the halfway point of 5 (out of 10). There was also an overarching trend throughout all three surveys regarding student interest in writing *in general*, and their interest in writing *in school*: for those prompts, all students (with a singular exception on the second survey), indicated responses that were within one point of the other. For example, on the final survey, one student indicated that their general writing interest was at 6 out of 10 for writing in general, and a 5 out of 10 when it came to writing for school. All data collected followed a similar pattern: each response was within one point of the other – sometimes up, and sometimes down.

Not that anyone requires specific data to prove this point, but I found it incredibly interesting that so many students so consistently stated, without any kind of prompting, that they strongly disliked writing book reports. I was so interested, in fact, that I did some inquiring around my school to find what the story behind this was. My assumption was that they had done book report projects in third grade, but apparently they actually

focused on this in second grade. Needless to say, most students were not partial to this experience – so much so that it still sticks out in their minds two years later.

Another interesting trend was the growth the entire group seemed to make in terms of their interest in writing as the unit progressed. The mean-rating for the first survey was 6.4; the mean-rating for the second was 6.7; and the mean-rating for the final survey was 7.2. While a 0.8 point uptick is not exceptional (and I will discuss the margin for error in the following chapter), it *does* indicate a growing interest among the participants. If we were to look at the mode-rating, it went from 5, to 5 again, to finally, 9. This once more demonstrates an increasing interest in writing among the class.

Finally, perhaps the most telling piece of data to be gleaned from this Student Writing Interest Survey has to do with what students thought about the importance of writing instruction. Every student surveyed, in all three surveys, all indicated that *yes*, writing instruction was important to them and they all agreed that it was worth the effort to develop these relevant skills.

Writing instruction surveys. It should be noted again that this survey was handed out as a companion to the Student Writing Interest Survey; therefore, on the days in which that survey was handed out, this one was too. As with the previous survey, there are some interesting and positive trends throughout these three as well.

On the first, the pre-unit survey, 3 of the 14 participants stated that the thing that they were most interested in learning about through the *Units of Study* curriculum had to do with fiction writing, while 11/14 said that they were more interested in the aspects of essay writing that we had been learning. When it comes to student interest in Writer's

Workshop, the mode indicated a rating of 5, while the mean was 6.4 out of 10. When students were asked about their confidence level when it came to their writing skills, the mode was 9 and the mean was 8.2 out of 10.

One the second survey, the one conducted midway through the unit, the participants' responses to what they have most enjoyed learning from *Units of Study* was much more varied. Four out of twelve were most interested in essay writing; 2/12 indicated free writing strategies; 1/12 said they most appreciated the Writing Process; 2/12 talked about their interest with learning how to take notes (for research work); 1/12 again indicated their interest in fiction writing skills; 1/12 said they appreciated the how-to book Writing Process (something covered in previous grade levels where the writer shares the details on how to do some particular thing with the reader); and 1 of these 12 participants gave no indication as to their preference. The mode-rating of student preference for Writer's Workshop was once again 5; but the mean dropped from last time by 0.1 and landed at 6.3. As far as student confidence is concerned, both of these numbers dropped as well: the mode was both 6 and 8 (from 9 previously), while the mean was 6.7 (a 1.5 point drop).

In the third and final Writing Instruction Survey that participants filled out, there continued to be some odd trends – especially considering previous survey results. Keep in mind that this last one was done immediately after completing the unit and project, and students seemed ready to move on to something new and less rigorous. With that being the case, 7 out of the 13 surveyed indicated that essay writing was the most interesting writing skill they had learned; 1/13 indicated note-taking; 1/13 said it was the

fiction-Writing Process; and 4/14 gave no indication at all. When it came to student interest in Writer's Workshop, once again, for the third time in a row, the mode-rating was right in the middle at 5 out of 10. The mean, however, was 6.8, surpassing both of the previous surveys' data. When it came to student confidence, the mode this time was both 6 and 9, while the mean rating was 6.9 – a rise from the second survey, but still significantly lower than the first (which was, again, 8.2).

While much of this specific data may not seem particularly significant, some much more interesting trends did appear when spanning all three Writing Instruction Surveys. For example, one key trend that immediately made itself apparent was that there was absolutely no correlation between the number of years students had used *Units of Study* and either their interest rating nor their confidence level.

But perhaps the most glaring trend that I observed throughout all of the Writing Instruction Surveys was the fact that every student, on every survey, claimed that they were happy with using the *Units of Study* curriculum and that it was indeed preparing them for their futures (this was question number four). I found it quite interesting that despite any given students' feelings towards writing, writing instruction, or curriculum, everyone consistently emphasized that the concepts and skills that they were learning through *Units of Study* were worthwhile and were adequately preparing them for their futures in both academia and in life in general.

Clearly, there was a significant amount of data collected through these two different surveys, the Student Writing Interest Survey and the Writing Instruction Survey. By distributing these at specified times (before the unit, midway through the unit, and

after the completion of the unit), I feel that I gained valuable insights into students' thoughts concerning writing, writing instruction, *Units of Study*, and their own skills and confidence levels.

Observations/Field Notes

Throughout the course of the entire unit, I recorded observations of my class during writing work-time after delivering a lesson. I did this with the Field Notes Template that I created (see Appendix F). I took these field notes at specific intervals: after delivering lessons 1, 5, 10, 15, and 21 (it was meant to be lesson 20, but this did not pan out due to timing). The idea was that I would deliver the given lesson for the day and as I sent the class off to write, I would record any relevant or particularly interesting anecdotes, insights, trends, or information.

It should be noted how a *Units of Study* lessons tends to unfold. It begins with a Connection, some story or related lesson that will introduce the topic of the day. At the end of this section, the Teaching Point is given (the goal of the lesson). The next section is Teaching, where the instructor unpacks the concept of the day and provides more specific detail. There is then the Active Engagement, where the students are encouraged to collaborate, share, and think deeply about the day's concept – often trying it on their own in some way. Finally, there is the Link, the parting thoughts the teacher gives to the students before they head off to write. The idea of this workshop model is that some students may be ready for the presented lesson's concepts that day, while others may not be – and that is okay. The concepts are presented and the students should utilize them when they do arrive at that given stage of the Writing Process.

Overall, the biggest and most positive trend I noticed throughout the course of this unit was an overarching enthusiasm and excitement among the students (which was noted through my Field Notes, interviews, general observations, and anecdotal evidence). I built this unit up to really encapsulate the heart of our entire year – where so much of what we had studied came together (writing essays and informational texts, conducting research, and covering themes of civic engagement, debate/argument, and backing up claims with reasons and evidence). With my personal enthusiasm and interest in the actual topic of the American Revolution, as well as for writing in general, by and large, my students' interest, enthusiasm, and skill level dramatically increased. Daily, they were eager to continue their research about their chosen subtopics, take notes, collaborate, plan, synthesize, and draft their ideas.

While much of the general data that I recorded using the Field Notes Template was very helpful in terms of recording how things were going, I feel that much of the specific information recorded will not be relevant to the focus of this paper. For example, most often, the kinds of questions students would be asking during this work-time were mostly focused on topic-specific ideas (“How long did the Battle of Bunker Hill last?” for example). What this data collection template was good for was to see how on-task and focused the class tended to be, how relevant a given lesson was to the class as a whole (depending on where everyone was at), and above all things, to record the growing enthusiasm, excitement, and expertise of the group – not just for this type of writing, not just for the Writing Process, but also for this content of the American Revolution.

One exception to all of this may have been in the first lesson. This unit-launch really helped to get the students excited about the challenging work that lay ahead. The entire group of participants were focused on this lesson (as it was the very beginning and the topic was about how to begin a new research project and garner enthusiasm for this work). As a whole, there was a lot of buy-in from the students and this definitely set the stage for the two books they would soon be researching for and writing.

On a scale of 0-10, with one exception, for each of these five lessons, I indicated that the class as a whole were on task and focused at an 8. The one exception was the second recorded Field Notes Template – lesson 5 (which I marked as a level 5). This was probably due to other things – outside of the writing work – which were taking place in and around our classroom. The lesson was an important one (how to include the exciting and dramatic aspects of history while writing about it) and there seemed to be a lot of enthusiasm for it. But despite this lack of focus (and the fact that a mere 3 participants indicated that they had put their efforts into this lesson's given purpose), almost the entire group said that they felt that they were productive and happy with the progress they had made that day.

Again, if there is anything to glean from the collected Field Notes it is that there was, very specifically, a growing enthusiasm about this work. As the unit progressed, students continued to gain confidence with this work, growing in their knowledge, skills and expertise, and above everything else, a noticeable sense of pride in what they were doing.

Focus Group

The purpose of utilizing a small focus group in this project was to get a more insightful look at how the Writing Process and the workshop model was supporting individual students as they tackled this complex project. I chose four students at random, based on the following categories: one who tended to struggle with writing work, one who tended to perform exceedingly well, and two who fell somewhere in the middle. Though it should be noted, despite these categorizations, the students that were chosen from each level did not end up necessarily falling into those categories by the end of the project. The pseudonyms of these participants were Jillian (more than proficient), Peyton (less proficient), Derek (mid-level proficiency), and Shaun (mid-level proficiency). The students were assigned these levels based on previous writing work that they had done throughout the year up to this point. Both Jillian and Shaun are White, Derek is African-American, and Peyton is Asian. And while Peyton did not qualify for ELL support, he did live in a household where the primary language spoken was not English (and so he tended to struggle a bit with things related to literacy).

This section is broken into two topics: the three interviews that I conducted with each member of the focus group and an analysis of their actual products (the two books). First, the interviews were conducted using the Interview Questions Template (see Appendix G). I tended to stick to the questions on the template that I created (though on the final one, since the project had been completed by then, I adjusted some of those questions to better demonstrate this fact). I used a video recording program on my laptop to record the interviews, but I also took thorough notes during each session. I conducted

these interviews with each student three times: first, after lesson 6, as they were nearing the completion of the first book; second, after lesson 20 as they were nearing completion of the second book; and finally, after the entire project was complete (within a week of the previous interview). The main purpose of conducting these one-on-one interviews was to look for increasing enthusiasm, motivation, confidence, expertise, and progress.

The purpose of the second section, where I will analyze each focus group member's published artifacts (books one and two), is to analyze individual students' work, progress, and growth from one book to the next. This will provide the reader with some specifics of what my fourth grade students were capable of (with the support of the *Units of Study* curriculum), and to demonstrate how I assessed their competency with these skills.

Focus group interviews. The first round of interviews were conducted after lesson 6 and shortly before the first of the two books was going to be due. Some students still had their work cut out for them (Derek, who sighed quite heavily at this prompt, and Shaun, who struggled quite a bit throughout the course of this project), while others felt comfortable right where they were (Jillian and Peyton).

While conducting the first batch of interviews with the focus group, there were some glaring trends that were immediately apparent. The first that comes to mind is how motivated and excited each of these students were. Yes, they all faced their own sets of challenges and obstacles - as this was an especially large and oftentimes overwhelming project - but despite that, they were all very excited about what they were learning, what they were creating, and what they were accomplishing. Some of the challenges that

everyone seemed to be facing at this stage in the project was managing their time – especially when it came to balancing the research aspect of the project to the actual writing. However, Derek summed this all up when he stated that “I like when I have the time to write. Like, just writing and writing and writing and not stopping... And then when I look at the chapter when it’s done. I really like that.” These students were pushing themselves on this project and finding great satisfaction in creating these books. For example, Peyton said that he was conducting a lot of research at home each night, as he was not satisfied with the resources we had available in the classroom on his topic of Alexander Hamilton.

It seemed that everyone faced another big challenge that was abundantly prevalent: “finding enough information,” when conducting their research, as Shaun stated. Each of these four students stated that as their primary obstacle. But as Jillian (accurately) predicted, once students had a chance to dig into their research even more and increase their knowledge and expertise on the American Revolution, their writing would begin to flow much smoother (this did, as it turns out, become quite true as noted later in the study). There was the overarching sentiment from each of them that they could not get that reflexive writing going because they were always having to stop and check a source. But again, later on this problem began to be alleviated when students become experts in their topics.

Yet, despite this challenge of balancing between researching and writing, each of them said that the part they found most enjoyable so far in the project was doing that research. They loved the idea of the accumulation of content-specific knowledge,

figuring out all of the details, and having the skills to share that information, through their writing, with others, as Peyton stated.

When it came to the actual skills involved with writing essays and informational books, all of the students claimed to be fairly comfortable at this point (“eight out of ten!”, Shaun proclaimed) – though it did not seem to be their favorite type of writing (most said they liked fiction writing more). They all, unanimously, agreed that the *Units of Study* curriculum definitely played a large role in setting them up to be successful for this type of project. They all cited the previous unit in the curriculum that had been their introduction to essay writing. Peyton specifically mentioned the “Boxes and Bullets” concept from that unit (by the same name), which concerned the idea of utilizing a box to contain one’s thesis statement, and then laying out bullet-pointed reasons and evidence to back up that claim (this concept played a big role throughout our entire year together in the classroom). Peyton cited the fact that this “Boxes and Bullets” strategy helped him figure out the structure of his writing before he actually began drafting. Derek had a similar sentiment, stating that utilizing the many aspects of the Writing Process, even before beginning to draft, was really helpful in getting himself and his work organized. He also went on to say that getting comfortable with writing essays throughout the previous months played a huge role in his current successes with writing this book “since each chapter is sort of like a mini-essay”. Jillian mentioned that she had originally thought that writing essays and informational texts was going to be much “more boring” but was pleased to discover how much she actually enjoyed it now.

Each of these four students also claimed, quite emphatically, that their writing abilities had grown significantly since the beginning of the year – each of them stating that *Units of Study* had played a big role in this. Derek even said that “I think my writing is getting faster and I’m writing more.”

When asked about what they were most proud of with their projects so far, they each said something along the lines of being happy with the amount of content and information they had accumulated, that they were becoming experts in this American Revolution topic and enjoying it quite a lot. They also all said that they were proud of the writing that they were producing on the subject and even more proud of the fact that they were overcoming challenges to get that far.

For the second round of interviews, I conducted them after lesson 20 (of 23). This means that, once more, students were nearing the completion of their books – this time, their second books. It should be noted that while there was significant support and scaffolding with the first book, for the second, it was much more hands-off on my part. While it was more extensive than the first, the main goal was in regards to growth from one book to the other. This second book was really set up as an assessment of the accumulated writing skills that the class had learned and practiced throughout the previous several months (for the first rubric, see Appendix B, and for the second rubric, see Appendix C).

It is also worth noting how far the students had come at this point compared to the first round of interviews. By this point, they were experts on their topics and getting even more confident with this type of writing. There was a clear trend among all (with

the exception of Shaun; more on that below), that they were digging in deep with this work, becoming experts in the content and the writing style, and taking incredible pride in what they were accomplishing. They talked with great confidence and with much more authority about their topics – they truly had become experts by this point.

However, this project was a big challenge for Shaun – and it was clear in the interview that he was quite exhausted with this work. Our plan for him, given his struggles with the first book, was to heavily revise and rework what he had already done, rather than start from scratch. In the interview, we discussed how he took my suggestion from last time to adjust his topic from “Important Aspects of the American Revolution” to focusing on “Important Military Aspects of the American Revolution”. He did this by taking out a chapter on the Boston Tea Party and writing a new one about military tactics to replace it with (more on how this turned out later).

The other focus group members, however, were much more enthusiastic and upbeat about their work - and about how close they were to finally finishing it. Derek, who was another student who was especially challenged by this work, showed incredible growth and enthusiasm. He had actually been out of town for the final lessons of the unit and missed some key parts – but ended up setting himself up with a routine each day: he would go with his grandfather to a quiet café to work each morning and he would not leave until a set amount had been written. He explained that having that daily routine was incredibly helpful to producing work he was especially proud of. He also said he felt this second book was going more smoothly because of the nature of the structure his topic allowed: Battles of the American Revolution lent itself well to a solid structural format in

which each chapter was about a different battle. He found focusing in on specific sub-topics like that was incredibly helpful. He later mentioned how the essay-writing template that we used heavily in the previous unit set him up for success on this. He went so far to say that he actually quite preferred this type of writing at this point because he liked writing about “true information” and because he appreciated the structure informational writing tended to follow. Above everything else, Derek said he was most proud of his use of quotes throughout his writing. Not just quotes, but finding just the right one for a given section. Again, he claimed that the curriculum “definitely” helped him reach this point with his writing work. He claimed that the original essay-writing template we utilized for so long, along with the accompanying lessons which discussed “having evidence to back up your claims”, was really working well for him. Derek happily and confidently proclaimed that his skills with this work had absolutely improved over the course of the year and this unit, due not only to the curriculum itself but also to his own persistence.

In the previous set of interviews, all of the students shared the sentiment that the most challenging aspect of the project so far was that they were not as knowledgeable about the content as they had wanted to be. This time, however, as predicted by Jillian, the entire group had clearly grown in their expertise on the topic, and therefore wrote with more confidence. She admitted that the most challenging aspect of the project was still “getting stuff to write about”(regarding her topic of the Continental Congresses) but found that once she did, the new challenge was that it was “hard to put it all together in a

chapter.” To clarify, she was claiming that with so much information, it was difficult to organize it in a cohesive way.

Another thing the students seemed to be most proud of was the actual improvement in their writing skills. Peyton, for example, claimed that his favorite part of this project was “being able to write and show how much I’ve been able to grow.” His growing confidence was clear because he talked about how he continued to bring his research work home with him regularly, and given the fact that he was focusing on weapons of the American Revolution, he had to overcome some challenges when it came to reading, understanding, and writing about a lot of technical information. But he persisted through it and clearly found great enjoyment out of the work (it should be noted that his reading skills were about a year below grade-level, and so this perseverance and enthusiasm were a critical growth-step for him). He also enthusiastically discussed how much he had been able to produce (he wrote more chapters than were even required – so he clearly had a lot to say).

The students all agreed, once more, that the *Units of Study* curriculum was setting them up for success with this project. They all cited the previous unit’s focus on essay writing, and the accompanying template, as to their biggest reason why. Peyton claimed that “writing an essay for the first time” this year and being able to practice it regularly was a big factor for his growing successes. He went on to claim, “This is helping me get better at my writing skills and reading.” He cited an example of how sometimes the day’s given lesson is not always relevant to what he is working on – but when he does encounter an issue or obstacles later, he can recall back to a lesson that he can use to

overcome the given challenge. Jillian also appreciated the curriculum, but had one complaint: there is very little focus, if any, on mechanics. While the ideas presented in the curriculum are rich and deep, very rarely do we ever focus on the specifics of strengthening sentences and general mechanics and this was a point of frustration for her throughout the project.

Again, the overarching theme among the focus group on this second interview was their ever-increasing confidence and enthusiasm. They recognized, again and again, that they were improving in their writing work and they were clearly incredibly proud of the work that they had produced since last we had the opportunity to check in.

For this third and final round of focus group interviews, it should be first noted that they were conducted within a week of the previous interview. So it goes without saying, with one notable exception, that not much has changed since then. However, that exception happened to be the fact that the books were now complete and had been submitted. We had been working on this type of writing for nearly six months, and on this project (rather intensely) for well over a month. The students produced perhaps the most sophisticated writing of their lives and overcame immense challenges with this project.

Considering the short amount of time since the last interviews took place, their responses to the questions were nearly identical to those from the week previous. To be clear though, the overarching theme that every student claimed though was that they were incredibly proud of the work they created and they knew that they had grown significantly as writers over the course of this project. Peyton even stated that this was

“one of the best things” he had ever done (and he would happily do it again, for fun, he claimed).

Despite the lack of change to the responses given, there were several fascinating and key insights gleaned from this final set of interviews. In one instance, Peyton was discussing his favorite aspects of this project as a whole. He went on to mention how he and a few other students had chosen the same topics for their work. When his friend was wondering about a specific question regarding that topic, Peyton had the answer in his notes and was excited and proud to share and help his colleague. Interestingly enough, that student went on to share the same information with yet another student. Peyton claimed that this collaboration felt extra special – being an expert and swapping ideas about serious topics was a really rewarding aspect of this work. He ended the interview by saying something rather profound regarding the Writing Process: “It’s pretty fun! Because you like, might not know something but then learn something after while you’re writing it.” I felt this was a great example about how writing about something forces one to think more deeply about it – and therefore, become even more knowledgeable about it. Jillian’s favorite aspect of this project was how all of the work and writing she did eventually pieced together in an impressive and cohesive product. She had all of her ideas written and then she “put it in order and [saw] how it all connects”. Jillian was especially pleased with that particular aspect of the project. She also noted that by spending so much time and effort with this type of writing, it gave her valuable insights into the writings of others: she said that she now read other sources with a more critical and discerning eye – now that she knows what goes into this type of informational text.

Despite his struggles, and handing in the project a day late, Shaun too claimed emphatically to have grown as a writer because of this project. When asked if the *Units of Study* curriculum aided in this growth, he stated, “Oh my gosh, yes!” He said that the lesson style just “makes sense”, and that he appreciated how the lessons presented new ideas and skills and then allowed him the time to go off and practice those concepts on his own. The thing Shaun claimed to be most proud of was the simple fact that he got it done. And again, despite his challenges, his finished product attested to his claimed growth (see the next section for more on this).

Derek, too, claimed to feel “very good” about being done and what he handed in. He said the most challenging part of the book was writing the introduction chapter (which was required to be an “All About the American Revolution” section, as well as needing to let the reader know what the topic of the book was going to be and setting up what each chapter would be about). Derek was rather overwhelmed by all of that, but his hard work ended up paying off. His favorite aspect of the book was the table of contents – perhaps because it allowed him to “lay out my chapters” and because it was “not too much work... It was just fun.” He said it was a very satisfying aspect of the project. He was also still quite proud of his quotes because they “weren’t just random, out of nowhere”, but fit in to his writing like a puzzle piece. Overall, Derek was really quite proud of “the whole thing!” and that he was “very comfortable” with this type of writing at this point. He said the curriculum of *Units of Study* “definitely” aided him in his clear growth as a writer this year and that having a chance of “doing it all the time” forced him to perfect

his writing skills. At the end of the interview he stated that the two books he produced were definitely the best things he had ever written.

Once more, despite the challenges each student faced with this work, they all clearly grew as writers in significant ways. They became increasingly enthusiastic about the content and writing this type of informational book as the unit progressed – possibly due to the fact that they were becoming experts in both aspects of this project.

However, it is not quite enough to say that the students were proud and pleased with their finished products. True, their motivation, interest, and confidence clearly grew throughout this unit. But how did they actually perform and, more importantly, grow throughout this project? The next section will detail how each of these four focus group students performed, based on the rubrics for each of the two books that they wrote.

Focus group artifacts. Before I discuss the results of the focus group's artifacts, I would like to first lay out my grading system, as well as the means by which I assessed each of these books. First off, for nearly everything I assess, I utilized a 0-4 scale. A zero indicates the lack of an attempt made. A one shows that it was done, but did not capture the main idea of what was being assessed – "Beginning". A two indicates that the task was done and had some valid aspects to it – "Developing". A three shows that it was done quite well, but not perfectly – "Secure". And a four indicates that the item was done exceptionally well – "Exceeds".

On the first book's rubric, there were four categories that I was assessing (each with several specifics that went along with them). Those categories were "Research",

“Structure”, “Content”, and “Mechanics/Logistics”. For more specifics in each category, see Appendix B.

On the second book, I utilized all of the same categories (though most were expanded upon and required more complex work), but also included a fifth category: “Growth” (see Appendix C). The most important aspect that I was looking for from students over the course of this entire project was for them to grow as writers. After the first books were complete, I assessed them all using the rubric and then wrote extensive, specific, and careful feedback for each student, laying out what worked particularly well and what they should focus on for the second book. Again, when assessing the second book, I made a point to specifically compare it to their first. Did they utilize the feedback and focus on those particular aspects of growth? Did their writing become more in-depth and sophisticated? Above all things, this is what I was looking for on the final product.

The first book had a maximum score of 16 (four categories, each with up to four “points”). The second book, being more complex and having the added “Growth” category, had a maximum score of 20. To be clear though, I would like to make a point that I do not use the idea of “points” in the traditional sense. The 0-4 scale indicates levels of understanding and the degree to which a student demonstrated the given idea in their work. This is how the rubric and grading were conducted in this project, and in all assignments in my classroom.

Despite struggling through the project, especially early on, Derek ended up producing two very strong books. On his first, he received a grade of 14/16 (which comes to 87.5%). I found that he did an exceptionally good job with synthesizing his many

sources, with crafting a strong conclusion, incorporating a strong and cohesive structure to the entire book, and utilizing the Writing Process to persist through his challenges. The two items that he was marked down for was first, not incorporating an explicit thesis statement throughout his book (though he does get to it in his conclusion); and second, for a few spelling and punctuation issues. But overall, it was a well written and strong piece of writing. The main goal I set for him (aside from checking his spelling), was to deliberately incorporate a thesis statement in his introductory chapter and throughout his next book.

On the second book, Derek received a score of 19/20 (95%). This is 7.5% growth compared to his first book. I would note now the items in which he did especially well, but honestly, the entire paper was so strong I feel that it was truly an exemplar piece of writing for this project. The singular item missing (and the one “point” he lost) had to do with incorporating his opinion at some point into the paper. As mentioned above, Derek had been out of town for several of the last lessons, and thus missed this critical addition to the rubric and what the expectations were for it (the idea was that the students had clearly become experts in their chosen topics by this point and in doing so, had expert opinions that they should now be incorporating into their books). Everything else, however, was incredibly strong. In particular, the category of Growth. Not only was his “content more thorough and complex” compared to his first book, but he truly took my specific feedback to heart. I noted that he did include a solid thesis statement in his introductory chapter (not to mention the fact that the spelling issues were cleared up as

well). All in all, Derek did a fantastic job on both books, but most importantly, utilized my feedback to perfect his writing skills and grow as a writer.

On Jillian's first book, she received a score of 12/16 (75%). The category of Structure appeared to be the most challenging for her, as she did not include an introductory chapter, nor a concluding chapter. Her paper also lacked an explicit thesis statement and she did not really utilize the essay writing format in any of the chapters. Despite these structural issues, she still wrote a reasonably strong paper. Obviously, the goals I set for her on the second book were to include an introduction, a conclusion, and a clear thesis statement to tie everything together. On top of that, I also urged her to focus on organization in general so things moved in a logical order.

On her second book, Jillian received a grade of 17/20 (85%). This was a 10% increase from her first book. While a much stronger, more complex paper in general, she did not really focus on the first book's issues nor my feedback in writing this second book. While she did have a solid introduction, and included a conclusion (though it could have been stronger), the biggest areas of growth for her on this was including a thesis statement that she utilized throughout and incorporated the essay-style format and structure to her paper. This really made a powerful difference in her ability to communicate complex ideas through her written work.

Next we have Peyton. On his first book, he received a grade of 14/16 (87.5%). I noted that he did an especially good job at synthesizing his many sources into his writing, and also did an impeccable job with his conclusion (even including a powerful thesis statement). Similar to other students, Peyton's biggest area for growth had to do with

utilizing the essay-writing structure and incorporating an explicit thesis throughout his work (though again, he did include one in his concluding chapter).

On the second book, Peyton received a grade of 17/20 (85%). Unfortunately, this was actually the only student in the focus group whose grade did not grow from the first book to the second, but in fact dropped by 2.5%. In terms of the Growth category though, his work was decidedly more complex and detailed throughout the book. But he did not utilize the explicit thesis statement in his book again, nor did he incorporate the essay-writing structure that I encouraged him to focus on in the previous piece. Again, this marked the only drop in work quality throughout the focus group, and it was a seemingly negligible percentage.

Finally, we have Shaun. Of all the students in the focus group, Shaun seemed to struggle the most throughout the entirety of this project. He also, I feel, happened to be the student with whom I worked the closest with in this unit (as we both noted in his interview, much of this happened due to his struggle to stay motivated). On his first book, Shaun received a grade of 11/16 (68.8%). I noted on his rubric that the strongest factor in this piece was his concluding chapter (where he did an excellent job summarizing the big ideas of the rest of the book). Aside from the finished product being a bit sloppy and not really what I would consider a “published” piece, his biggest challenge here had to do with structure (as well as incorporating evidence to support his claims) and utilizing the Writing Process (he admitted that he wanted to be done with it and so did not spend as much time as he knew he should have on revising and editing his writing before publishing it). I also made a note of the fact that despite he and I working closely together

on this book, he did not take my recommendations of adjusting the focus of his paper. Again, his topic was “The Most Important Aspects of the American Revolution”. I pointed out to him that save for one chapter on the Boston Tea Party, nearly everything he was writing about had to do with military aspects. I encouraged him to cut that chapter out, replace it with another thematically-relevant chapter and shift the thesis to something having to do with important military aspects of the Revolution. He did not end up doing this on his first book.

Therefore, like several other students in class, my biggest goal-setting suggestion for him was to not start from scratch on a new topic for the second book, but to heavily revise and polish what he already had – especially given his admitted struggles with motivation. If he put all of that effort into focusing his second book on just one specific idea as well as making the writing all it could be, I knew that he would be successful.

Luckily, this second time around, he did take that advice. Shaun received a grade of 17/20 (85%). That, compared to his first book, was a remarkable increase of 16.2%. This second book of his took a decidedly more sophisticated direction. He clearly took his work, and my feedback, seriously and produced something incredibly important. Aside from taking my specific advice, Shaun’s writing was more complex and reached deeper into details. There was a powerful introduction and he incorporating a coherent structure. He did in fact turn his focus to the military aspects of the American Revolution (which happened to be the title of the paper), and did end up cutting the Boston Tea Party chapter, which he replaced with a chapter about military tactics. As I noted on his rubric, this new chapter happened to be the best aspect of his new book. Really, the only items

he was knocked down for was not handing the book in on time, not using his in-class work-time effectively, and not including his own opinion in the book at any point. But truly, Shaun's growth and his overcoming of his own challenges, are very telling of the power of the Writer's Workshop model.

Now that I have presented the particular details of the focus group – their ups and downs, their struggles and success, the insights into their Writing Processes, their results, and their growth – I would now like to move onto the results of the whole group of participating students and see how their work compares to that of the focus group. After analyzing this data, I will connect this work and their grades to the actual Common Core State Standards that I utilized to grade their writing work for this portion of their fourth grade year.

Whole Group Results and Alignment to the Common Core State Standards

It would appear that the artifacts and products, strengths and goals, and accomplishments and growth of the focus group were remarkably indicative of the entire group of participating students as a whole. Nearly everything covered in the previous section concerning the focus group was actually a microcosm of what the entire group's experiences were.

Let us first begin with the actual assessment results. For the first book, the mean grade of the entire group was 78.6% (which would indicate a grade of somewhere between 12 and 13 out of 16), which seemed to be about in the mid-range of the scores of the focus group. The mode grade was 87.5%, which was exactly the same as the focus group's mode grade.

On the second book, the mean grade was 88.6% (which would indicate a grade between 17 and 18 out of 20). The mode grade was 85% (which was exactly 17/20).

Taken as a whole, the whole group mode score went down by 2.5% from the first to the second book, while the mean score actually *increased* by 10%. Given that the mode represents the most commonly given grade and the mean is the average grade of the entire group, I feel that both represent incredibly valuable data. But I feel that the mean is more reflective of what had actually occurred throughout this work and not merely because it tends to show significant growth. It shows the wide range of abilities, from those who struggled with this work to those who excelled with it and everyone in between. But again, both of these types of data analysis have been quite useful for this project.

There is some more data that I feel is also very revealing, too. For each of the books, I tallied up what were the most commonly presented strengths throughout the entire group, as well as what should have been set as a goal/focus for growth. In the first book, the most common strengths across the class appeared to be the ability to effectively synthesize sources into their own words, as well as writing generally meaningful content and writing strong and well-laid out conclusions.

As far as goals and areas for growth on this first book are concerned, the ideas that much of the class seemed to struggle with the most were the concept of incorporating an explicit thesis throughout their books, as well as utilizing the presented essay-writing structure from chapter to chapter. Again, I feel that the areas of strength and the areas for growth were strongly correlated from the focus group to the whole group.

When it came to the final book, similar trends also presented themselves. The most common strength appeared to have to do with writing the ever-challenging introduction (which, of course, not only presents the topic of the book and lays out the structure of the entire thing, but also serves as an All-About the American Revolution section to provide the reader with the proper context – a challenging task, indeed). But of the 14 participants, 8 of them especially excelled with this on their second books. Other strengths of note had to do with utilizing a cohesive structure throughout their writing, and incorporating an explicit thesis statement. Considering that this last aspect appeared to be a goal shared by many, it is no surprise that another positive strength among the students was the Growth section – nearly everyone improved in some way, if not drastically.

As far as goals and suggestions for improvement are concerned, I noticed something right away: compared to the first book, where there were more tallies in the goal-section than in the strength category, this time around there were significantly more tallies with student strengths and far fewer having to do with things that needed to be improved. This item in and of itself is incredibly telling in terms of growth among the participants over the course of this entire project. Specifically, the item on the list which had the greatest number of students not incorporate into their work had to do with including their opinion at some point in their books (but this number was only 4, two of whom were actually Derek and Shaun). One other item several students (3 of them) continued to struggle with was the conclusion – which appears to be a trend among fourth graders, in general.

Overall, however, there was significant growth from book one to book two, not just among the focus group, but the entire class of participants – again, if using the mean scores, exactly 10% growth.

As far as the Common Core State Standards are concerned, I chose to utilize six in particular (see Appendix A for details). Yes, there were significantly more than that that I could have incorporated into this project. But many relevant standards had already been assessed in the previous trimester in our class. And furthermore, I felt strongly that these six got at the heart of the project. And to be clear, these six standards are how I transfer the graded rubric scores to students' actual report cards.

The following are the five standards, as they are written in the CCSS, along with a number that I will use as short-hand as I explain the data:

- (1) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.2.A -Introduce a topic clearly and group related information in paragraphs and sections; include formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
- (2) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.2.B - Develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.
- (3) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.2.E - Provide a concluding statement or section related to the information or explanation presented.
- (4) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.4 - Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- (5) CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.5 - With guidance and support from peers and

adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.

(6) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.7 - Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

For standard (1), which I feel is best described as having to do with introducing one's topic and organizing it in a logical way (and including text features to aid in comprehension), had 10 students received an Exceeds, 2 students had Secure, and 2 had Developing. For standard (2), which covers general content that has been written, 8 students received an Exceeds, 5 students with Secure, and 1 with Developing. For (3), which specifically covers the concept of a conclusion, 10 students received an Exceeds, 1 student demonstrated a Secure, and 3 qualified as Developing. On (4), which specifically has to do with how the writing was organized, 7 students qualified as Exceeds, while the other 7 received Secure. With (5), which I felt covered much of the Writing Process, specifically in regards to planning, revising, editing, and growth (from one book to the other), 9 students received an Exceeds, 3 students qualified for Secure, 1 student had Developing, and 1 had Beginning. And finally, on (6), which can be summarized as students effectively conducting a research project, every participating student received an Exceeds.

Since I used the graded rubrics (specifically, from the second book), it is no wonder that the standards-based grades align as they do with the actual grades on the group's books. I noticed that from each of the six standards, those who received an Exceeds were at least, if not more, half of the participating group. Exceeds is clearly the

level of demonstration that the most students qualified for throughout the course of this project. And of all of the students assessed, from all of the standards, there was only a singular “Beginning” level.

It is clear that the data collected in my classroom for this research project demonstrates both growth among nearly all students, as well as indicating that the *Units of Study* curriculum allowed (in my opinion, and that of the participants) for that growth in skill level, as well as their general interest in this type of work. These conclusions show that in my small study, my hypothesis appears to be correct. However, how does my collected data align with that of the information obtained through the Review of the Literature? The following chapter will make these vital connects.

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to display the facts, trends, information, and data collected over the course of this research project. That collected data points directly to answering the guiding question that has been at the heart of this paper: *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students’ writing skills using the workshop model?*

Through the two different surveys, the Student Writing Interest Survey and the Writing Instruction Survey, which were distributed three times throughout this unit, I was able to glean a plethora of information about how students felt about writing and writing instruction. This was not only helpful in getting a general idea of how the participants felt about this subject, but even more importantly, to see how their feelings and thoughts changed and evolved throughout this project. It turns out that interest in writing and

Writer's Workshop both increased very slightly, while confidence seemingly decreased as the project progressed.

Through the use of my Observation/Field Notes template, I was able to record the growing interest, confidence, expertise, and enthusiasm that the students were feeling about their research project throughout the course of this study. While not necessarily quantifiable data, it was incredibly helpful, at least anecdotally.

The data gleaned from the focus group, both in their one-on-one interviews, as well as a closer examination of their finished artifacts was incredibly insightful and helpful. As noted earlier, their work seemed to be pretty significantly indicative of the class as a whole. In their interviews, they exhibited increasing confidence, knowledge, enthusiasm, and pride in the work they were performing. This also happens to line up remarkably well from what was observed with their actual finished products too: for the most part, there were significant increases in their writing skills.

And finally, what was observed from the focus group was also reflected in the class as a whole, at least when it came, specifically, to their writing skills. Using the mean grades from the participants' first books and comparing them to their second books, the group as a whole increased in their abilities by 10%. And through the presentation of these grading rubrics, I made the connections between them and the Common Core State Standards that I utilized to assign grades for writing in this trimester of the school year. Overall, almost the entire class tended to receive either a Secure or an Exceeds grade for each of the six assessed standards.

In the next, and final chapter, I will reflect on the entirety of this research project. The main purpose of that chapter will be to draw more explicit and final conclusions about all of the data collected, especially in connection to other aspects of this project. I will also discuss what was learned, including how the gathered information related to the initial Literature Review, as well as detailing the limitations that presented themselves throughout this project. I will also get at what similar research projects could do differently in the future. All of this will be in an effort to finally answer the guiding question of this paper: *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students' writing skills using the workshop model?*

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

Introduction

The research has been conducted. The study is complete. The data has been thoroughly analyzed and presented. Now, it is time to both draw the conclusions from all of the above, as well as conclude this paper and project. This entire project began as a search for the answer to the question of: *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students' writing skills using the workshop model?* By the end of this chapter, my findings, conclusions, and answers will be completely presented.

The first section that I will present will have to do with the Findings and Results of this entire project. To begin with, I discuss what, as a whole, has been learned through the course of this venture. Not just in the context of answering the research question, but also in regards to what was learned about being a writer and a learner.

In the second section, I revisit the Review of the Literature, drawing conclusions by comparing the data collected in my own study and connecting it to that which was initially presented in Chapter Two. I will put particular emphasis on the authors that most thoroughly influenced the writing of this paper and the conducting of this research project.

The following section will revolve around the theme of Next Steps. I will first discuss the possible implications the findings of my study might have on education as a whole. I will then present my many conclusions as to the limitations that my study in particular had – there were a great many critiques that I had, even as it was being conducted. That topic will transition into my suggestions for what could be done differently in similar studies, either my own or by others who are interested in continuing this work.

The last section will be on my Conclusions. Here, I will finally present, explicitly, what I believe to be the answers to my guiding research question of: *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students' writing skills using the workshop model?*

By discussing the results and findings, presenting a variety of possible next steps, and by overtly answering my research question, I hope to make it abundantly clear just how utterly important the workshop-model of writing instruction truly is to education in the twenty-first century.

Findings and Reflections

Over the course of this lengthy study, which for me has lasted over a year, and has truly been the most demanding and challenging project of its kind for me, I have learned a great many things, to say the least. I have learned and drawn conclusions about the actual topic of this paper, writing and writing instruction, which has long fascinated me – in one way or another, I have loved the idea since I was at least the age of the students that I conducted this research with. I have learned a tremendous amount about actual

research – the kind of work that I have not had many opportunities to do since my undergraduate days when majoring in U.S. history. And I have learned a lot about myself as a writer and as a learner.

I feel as though I am truly an expert in this subject at this point, having spent so much time and energy reading, researching, note-taking, thinking about and actually writing about this topic of elementary school writing instruction. This covers everything from thoroughly knowing and understanding the relevant Common Core State Standards related to writing instruction, to best and most effective practices that convey those ideas and make my students successful with the discipline. I have come to get a better understanding of who I am as a writer, what works for me and what does not. For this type of paper, for example, I found that I could only perform meaningful work when I had a large amount of time to really get into it, as it tends to take me a bit of time to get into the proper frame of mind to make sense of this complex type of work. And as I continuously told my students throughout this process, the type of writing that I was teaching them to become proficient with essentially involved the same concept of what I myself had to do for this very paper, though slightly more demanding and lengthy. But the dual importance of content and structure remained as the central idea in making this everything it could be. And the concepts incorporated into the Writing Process that we studied as a fourth grade class so thoroughly were the same ideas that went into writing this capstone as well. All in all, this was a rather intensive and complex project, so it is of no surprise that much was learned through this process.

Findings. To begin with: the results. Although the data itself has been meticulously laid out in the previous chapter, I have tried my best to refrain from explicitly stating my interpretations of the compiled information. I would not say that much of it was altogether surprising – though I can now admit that it certainly was what I had hoped to see. My students grew tremendously, and much of that I do credit to the *Units of Study* curriculum. I had such incredible success with it as a whole last year, especially in regards to this third unit in which students researched and wrote at great length about the American Revolution. In all honesty, I was hoping that the previous year's successes and overarching growth in skill and enthusiasm were no mere fluke. I am absolutely pleased to announce that they were not. It was beautiful to see remarkably similar, albeit unique, trends display themselves this year as well.

I have also learned a tremendous amount about conducting research as well. I have found it endlessly amusing that as my students conduct their research projects on the American Revolution, something I am quite familiar with from my time as an undergrad as a history major, I too was conducting a research project about them as they conducted their own research projects. Again, so much of what I was teaching *them* was also incredibly relevant to *me*. And not just in terms of researching, but more importantly, in writing as well. What I have taught them about how to construct and organize an essay is exactly the same idea of what I have done here to accomplish this monumental and challenging task. It is precisely the same idea, albeit more complex – and I tell them that too. It is all about laying out a logical structure, getting content on the page as thoroughly

as possible, and then meticulously editing and revising the mess you have made, before finalizing and publishing the thing. That is what I have had my students do for the entirety of our time together, and now, with everything wrapped up, I am taking my own advice and doing just that. They have found that rather amusing, to say the least.

I also feel that I have learned the answers to the guiding question of this paper. Through the workshop model, my students have clearly grown as sophisticated writers. Every participant in this study demonstrated competency (and more) with this complicated work. And in doing so, nearly all of them showed proficiency (if not mastery) of the relevant Common Core Standards associated with this project. Furthermore, this workshop model absolutely aided in garnering enthusiasm and motivation among the students. My collected data pointed to the fact that as the project progressed, so too did student motivation (this was seen in the interviews, observations and surveys). Apart from my own passion being a driving point in this project, I feel that a huge part of this success had to do with how the students began to see themselves as authentic writers. They were doing complex and real-world work every day, finding meaning through it, being successful with it, and taking great pride in all that they were accomplishing. Again, it must be noted how profoundly important the authenticity-factor can be in building students up for success.

Reflections. While much of the data points to the validation of my feelings and assumptions regarding writing and writing instruction, I have also learned a significant amount in terms of the discipline simply through reflecting on all that I have experienced throughout this project.

As stated throughout the interviews and surveys, many of the participating students cited the previous unit, titled “Boxes and Bullets”, which was their first taste of essay-writing, as the reason for much of their feelings of confidence and success with this significantly more complex project. Truthfully, my original intention was to conduct this study during *that* unit instead of this third one. But now that it has all been completed, I do not know if I would have seen the same kind of enthusiasm or confidence if that had been the case. I know it set them up for success, but the content that we focused on in this third unit, the American Revolution, seemingly made this project what it was. Students had to utilize all of what they learned from the previous unit about writing essays and informational texts, and use it in a decidedly more thrilling direction to convey important ideas that were as important and relevant as anything could be.

I have to pat myself on the back a little bit with that one too. I am regularly told by colleagues that my enthusiasm and passion, and not just for writing and history, are what have made me as successful in the classroom as I have been. Therefore, since history and writing are absolutely my two favorite subjects, I know that my passion for each played a pivotal role in hyping up this unit and the accompanying work. I have taught my students that history, especially the history that narrates how the country of which they are all citizens was founded, is relevant, interesting, exciting, and important. Really, this unit of writing (and reading) is at the heart of my fourth grade year. So much of what we do, as a class, is somehow connected to this project. Civics, democratic systems, debate and argument, essay-writing, pushing ourselves to overcome challenges,

and taking immense pride in the work that we create are all prevalent themes in our year together, and without them, I know that we would not have had the successes that we did.

Therefore, I know that the successes seen among my students in this project were a combination of what we have focused on throughout the year together, my enthusiasm and expertise for the content (of history) and the craft (of writing), and of course, the workshop-based curriculum of *Units of Study*. All of these things interlocked and worked together to produce not just the excitement and enthusiasm for this work among my students, but also their impressive amount of growth and pride in what they accomplished throughout the entirety of this project.

I do recognize, however, how incredibly powerful a variable my own enthusiasm for unit was for my students. Really, if I utilized virtually any other curriculum or unit, and maintained my high level of passion throughout it, I believe my students would have been just as successful (both in terms of skills and enthusiasm) as they were with unit three of *Units of Study*.

Another important factor that I noted throughout this project, but was not in any way a component of this study, was how students seemed to be growing in their reading skills, in addition to their writing abilities. Obviously, these two domains are interconnected and this should come as no surprise. However, I could not help but notice how when students were reading and writing with purpose, both skills improved significantly. When one must take notes and write about what was just read, one also gains a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of the content as well. Peyton comes to mind on this point: at the beginning of the year, his reading skills were more than a

year below grade level (and again, he came from a household where English was not the primary language being spoken). But the fact that he would routinely bring his work home with him to read, take notes, and write completely of his own volition ended up paying off for him quite well: while still not fully up to grade level by the end of the school year, he had made significant gains.

This work that I have conducted throughout this project has allowed me to grow as a writer, as a researcher, and as a learner. While nothing I have discovered was particularly shocking or surprising, it is nice to have my feelings and thoughts on these subjects fully validated by not only the experts, but my own findings as well.

The Study's Data Compared to the Review of the Literature

When it comes to the research aspect, nothing has challenged me more than the Review of the Literature. Despite its obstacles, it has allowed me to grow significantly in regards to this type of work.

With little to no exceptions, according to the data that I have collected throughout this project in my classroom, nearly everything presented in my Review of the Literature chapter fits absolutely perfectly. To prove this point, I will cite examples from that chapter and demonstrate the connection between the presented idea and an example from my own study that validates said idea. In order to do so, I will layout this section in the same way that Chapter Two was laid out: First, I will examine the connections between the Common Core State Standards and what I did in my project. Next, we will take a look at some of the Concerns and Issues presented and how our work in the classroom

supported those ideas. And finally, I will take a look at the proposed Solutions from that chapter and discuss how they worked or did not work in my research project.

Again, the data speaks for itself and appears to be in fine alignment with those ideas presented in the Review of the Literature chapter.

Common Core State Standards. Given the six standards that I used to assess this project for my students, I feel that those were more than adequate for the purposes I needed them for. I felt that they were rigorous and authentic enough to be effective concepts by which to assess my students' writing abilities.

In my Review of Literature chapter, I cited Graham and Harris (2013), where they claimed that the CCSS have four main purposes for the application of writing – to write for multiple purposes, to create well organized writing that is appropriate to a specific task, to utilize writing as a means by which to interpret and build on knowledge about a particular topic, and to facilitate learning for a wide variety of subjects. To the point: that is precisely what we did in our two-book research/writing project. One of the most important aspects of this project was to emphasize organization to convey ideas about the American Revolution. And along with the companion unit of Reader's Workshop, students not only increased their writing skills, but their reading skills as well. Through their enthusiastic and thorough research on their chosen topics, they became not only experts in their specific subjects, but reading nonfiction texts, as well as note-taking and writing about what they were learning. I cannot emphasize this enough: these students are experts on the subject of the American Revolution and that is not merely due to the fact that they spent a lot of time reading about it. It is specifically

because they were reading for a purpose: to write about it. And in doing so, their skills increased dramatically in both reading and writing.

Troia et al. (2015) claimed that communicating through writing is of the utmost importance in the modern world, and I could not agree more. They also claimed that 3 out of every 4 students in the U.S. are not able to write to fully meet grade-level standards. According to the data that I presented in the previous section above, that does not have to be the case at all. With very few exceptions, nearly my entire class of participants received either Secure or Exceeds grades on their writing work for this project.

According to Woodard and Kline (2016), as well as Baker (2017), writing should not necessarily be a solitary activity, but a social one. And I could not agree more with them. Even my focus group student, Peyton, emphasized this throughout the project: his absolute favorite aspect of this project was collaborating with his colleagues, sharing sources and notes, swapping ideas and musings, and generally working with others to be successful. This is also an overarching trend. According to my field notes, there is a decided shift in the classroom atmosphere when students are reading and writing for research purposes as opposed to working with fiction: it is incredibly social, despite my efforts to create a quiet and independent work space. Students could not help themselves but to connect with one another, point to interesting artifacts or ideas in the sources they were sharing, collaborate in their note-taking work, and bounce ideas off of one another for their actual writing (and in a number of circumstances, several students helped one another to draw and illustrate the covers of their completed books). By all means, this type of work can, and *should*, be social.

According to Golub (1971), students tend to strongly dislike writing - and this trend apparently only grows as students move up in grade-level. I would argue that this does not have to be the case, by any means. According to my surveys and interviews as described earlier in this chapter, students actually seemed to *increase* in their interest in writing as the project moved forward. And recall that every student indicated that they felt that this writing instruction was definitely important to their future successes.

One thing of note, however, is Calkins (1994) mentioned that the ideas presented in the Workshop Model (as well as in the CCSS), do not emphasize basic mechanics – and that they are not as important as writing authentically for a real purpose. However, according to Jillian in the focus group, some students still do crave - and require - direct instruction on basic mechanics. But I would argue that when students are writing authentically and are finding purpose and enjoyment, that those sorts of issues eventually fall into place on their own (the other three members, and Jillian as well, increased in their use of basic mechanics over the course of this project).

Concerns and issues facing teachers of writing. In this section, I will address a number of ideas that were presented in its mirrored section from Chapter Two.

The first concept that comes to mind in this paper, as well as if one asked any random teacher, as to why writing tends not to be emphasized in school today, the response tends to be a lack of time. Did I have an agenda for focusing on writing in my classroom? Of course. But the point is that I *made* time for it. Even if I were not conducting this research project, I would have done so anyway. And I would argue that none of the other core subjects suffered because of it – on the contrary, reading was even

more heavily emphasized than it would be otherwise because again, *students were reading with purpose*. I made (and continue to make) it a point to tie writing in to almost everything we do in my classroom – even across disciplines. And as the year moves forward, there is a noticeable increase in students writing skills in general.

Another presented idea that comes up frequently as to why teachers are not teaching writing is that they are frequently not trained to do so. And while this really does appear to be the case (even in my teacher training program), it did not hinder me in focusing on it in my classroom. I was fortunate enough to be placed with a master teacher for my student teaching experience (at the school that this project took place in) who was also partial to the *Units of Study* curriculum and in the Writer's Workshop model in particular. While I received no formal training at my university, my master teacher taught me much about how to plan and deliver these types of lessons, as well as in encouraging me to find the benefits of doing so. Again, I was fortunate to find a school that was full of teachers who felt as strongly about writing instruction as I do, as well as Writer's Workshop in particular.

Solutions. Once more, as with these previous sections, I found that the solutions that I presented Chapter Two also rang true for us throughout this research project as well.

The item that jumps out at me first has to do with the importance of motivation (Hayes & Olinghouse. 2015). And since that is a primary theme of this project itself, it was something I paid special attention to. Overwhelmingly, my collected data showed that student motivation tended to increase dramatically over the course of this project –

and that increased motivation clearly showed in their finished products (Peyton's growing interest in this work showed as he routinely brought his work home with him every night). Of course, Shaun comes to mind, too. Motivation seemed to be the biggest obstacle that regularly got in his way with this work – to be clear, however, this was not writing-exclusive for him, but had been a theme for him throughout his year with me, in all subjects.

I must admit that my own teaching style and philosophy may have played a rather large role in this motivation piece though. Through my enthusiasm, knowledge, and encouragement for not only writing and the Writing Process, but history as well, I know that this was a deciding factor for my students and their successes with this work. If a teacher is not inspiring their students, regardless of the task at hand, they cannot hope for them to be successful.

Calkins (1994), McCarthy (2013), and Woodard and Kline (2016) all emphasized the importance of modeling (see page 26 of this paper) in terms of allowing students to be successful in their writing. While I did very little modeling of actual writing in this project, I did have a lot of foresight from last year: I saved several exemplar books from the previous year to use as models for this year's class. These were not merely the works of high-achieving students, but also the products of students who *did* struggle with writing and with this project. Yet they, too, had overcome challenges and obstacles and created exceptional and exemplar products. I used these, especially at the beginning of the project, to not only demonstrate what it was that class would be creating, but to also motivate them and demonstrate that no matter where they were with

their writing skills, they too would produce incredible things in due time. And that promise clearly actualized by the end of this project.

Calkins (1994) also discussed the importance of the Writing Process. I too have emphasized that significantly throughout this very paper. I think though, that the results speak for themselves: through the heavy use and emphasis on the Writing Process, students found great success in their planning, researching, organizing, drafting, and publishing. And that is not merely my opinion: the data, surveys, and in particular, the interviews, back this bold claim up. Students found it incredibly helpful to work on this overwhelmingly and complex project by taking it bit by bit, piece by piece. We would not have had the successes that we did had students simply sat down and drafted their books without any planning or organizing. The focus group members emphasized this heavily throughout our interviews.

Finally, according to McCarthy and Yeon Sun (2011), the workshop model sometimes “leaves many students behind,” and what they really require is “more guided practice”. While this may often be true under different circumstances, it did not appear to be the case in this study. According to my data and assessments, no student who was a part of this research project was “left behind” by any means.

Overwhelmingly, it appears that the vast majority of the information that I collected over the course of this research project aligned perfectly with what I collected and proposed in the second chapter of this paper, the Review of the Literature. There are, of course, always exceptions, and circumstances can always dictate a lot of variation from what I collected. But in this particular case, the Literature and my collected data tell

precisely the same story: that a workshop-based writing instruction model can increase both student motivation in writing as well as their writing skills themselves, at least in a fourth grade classroom. Yet despite this ideal alignment, what more might be done with this topic and information in the future?

Next Steps

Now that everything is said and done, what comes next? At the very least, I am pleased, again, to have my personal philosophy validated: that deliberate and authentic writing instruction is absolutely key to the success of students, not just in terms of abilities, but motivation as well. This obviously means that I, personally, no matter where my career in education will take me, will continue to push for emphasizing this type of work in my classroom. But are there wider reaching ramifications? I would like to think that there are.

I recognize that the idea of the Common Core State Standards has been a bit contentious since their inception. But I am a little surprised to admit that I feel that they do a rather excellent job at preparing students for the world that they will one day inherit. At least when it comes to writing in fourth grade (though I do have some expertise in other subjects as well).

Given this decided shift in emphasizing writing with so many states having adopted the CCSS for their Literacy work, I am surprised that writing has continued to take a backseat to everything else. As I emphasized in the previous chapter, there is no reason why educators cannot incorporate more than one discipline into any given study. No, we cannot assume that students “just know how to write”, it *does* need to be

explicitly taught (should we also expect students to “just know how to multiply multi-digit numbers”?). But I have managed to weave that work into nearly every subject in my classroom: social studies, mathematics, science, etc.. And emphasizing this work has not detracted from any of those other subjects in anyway, but it has pushed my students to refine their writing skills. I would encourage anyone reading this paper with the ability to make drastic changes in classrooms, schools, districts, and policies, to consider the importance of deliberate and authentic writing instruction in classrooms across the nation.

Limitations. But what about the limitations presented throughout this project? First and foremost, despite the fact that it was essentially designed this way, the most frustrating aspect of this project was the small sample size. While my class was composed of 18 students, it was a challenge to simply get the 14 consent forms back to me in a timely fashion. With such a small group of participants to work with, I have to admit that even I doubt some of the findings presented in this study - but once again, the intention of this particular study was to focus on a singular classroom and nothing more far-reaching than that. Not only did I find this small sample size to be problematic, but I would have liked to not only cast a wider net as far as classrooms go, but also grade-levels and schools as well. I feel it would have been more reliable if the study spanned several (if not all) elementary grades, and to have had the opportunity to look to other, different schools to see what the wider range of experiences could contribute to further research.

Another limitation that has bothered me throughout this project was that I would have liked to have deliberately studied other kinds of Language Arts curriculum in other classrooms as well. How would the enthusiasm, interest, and skill-levels compare with other types of writing curriculums? This could have applied to both Writer's Workshop-based curricula, as well as those that do not utilize such a model.

Another challenging limitation was the fact that I feel that a study of this nature should really span more than a singular unit – and definitely more than a singular concept. Focusing solely on a historical research paper, though important, relevant, and near and dear to my heart, does not fully encapsulate everything I feel is important with developing writing skills in elementary school. It should cover not only other kinds of informational/nonfiction writing, but fiction as well (since this is clearly where student interest lays).

On top of all this, there were a number of margins for error in the data collected. This can be seen in some of the miniscule changes in varying quantitative data collected. I also have continually wondered about the accuracy of some of the responses I received in the varying surveys and interviews. Did my questions lead the participants too much? Did my relationships with students have an effect on how they responded or how I perceived their responses? There were plenty of opportunities for inaccuracies throughout, yet I still feel quite strongly that the spirit of the collected data is still entirely relevant.

Still, I personally feel that the minuscule scope through which this research project was conducted is not adequate. The findings have been positive, yes. But there is

so much more to the story that has not yet been explored. Therefore, I have some thoughts concerning what next steps I might take if I were to continue this research – or if anyone else were to continue it.

A further and ideal investigation would expand upon everything that I have listed above. To begin with, it would allow for a far larger sample group. It would span Kindergarten to fifth grade – and several classes from each. Some would utilize this curriculum, some would use other workshop-based models, and some would not incorporate explicit writing instruction in any way. It would also incorporate several schools across demographics (urban, suburban, and rural – and ideally across regions of the country). The interview questions, surveys, and observation/field notes templates would remain relatively similar – though they would need some adjusting based on the type of work being done in the classroom. I would also stagger the focus group interviews so that the last two were not conducted so close to each other.

If this far greater net were cast, I feel that more telling answers could then be ascertained. While I am pleased and impressed by the results of this particular research project, I know that it is but a minuscule sample of what possibilities exist for answering my guiding research question. This too, the specifics of the question itself, would also be expanded upon and broadened. With more students being observed and interviewed, in far wider contexts, using a wider variety of curricula, I think I would truly get at the heart of whether or not explicit and authentic writing instruction is really worth the time, energy and effort.

While I would love to utilize the findings from this research project to help support my school and coworkers in the writing work that we do with our students, as I mentioned earlier in this paper, as of this writing, the school will be doing away with the *Units of Study* curriculum, as well as any emphasis on the workshop model. That being the case, I intend to have this paper published so that the important information and data within can be readily available to those who have an interest in utilizing writing workshop in their schools and classrooms.

Conclusions

I now recognize that deliberate writing instruction really is worthwhile. We, as educators, know what works and what does not - we are experts on the subject. We know what students need to know to be successful and how they will best acquire the skills to do so. It is only a matter of whether we, not just as educators but as a society, are willing to expend that much effort into one of many obviously important domains of study for students to focus their time and efforts upon.

I feel that I knew the answer to my guiding question before I began this research project. Being familiar with this *Units of Study* curriculum, seeing the successes that it could bring, and noting the growth students were showing in not just their writing, but their communication skills pushed me to examine this particular question for this project. It is abundantly clear that a workshop-model of explicit and authentic instruction is, within my view, the ideal and optimal way for students to be practicing what it means to use their written words to communicate their ever-important thoughts, ideas, opinions, and narratives.

Again, the results of this study speak for themselves. As a whole, student writing skills improved over the course of this study. Their confidence, for the most part, grew as well. And their motivation also grew. All of these things were thoroughly displayed in the previous chapter. Yes, it was a small sample size. But consider the fact that the focus group was incredibly indicative of the participating group as a whole. Would it not stand to reason that these results may be indicative of an even broader group as well?

A workshop-based writing instruction model is the ideal way that writing instruction should be taught. And writing instruction should most definitely be taught – as important as reading skills or math and science work. These domains do not exist in a vacuum. They are all equally important, now more than ever. With the rise of technology, especially when it comes to communication, the ability to convey one's meaning through the written word is more important than it ever has been. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind, particularly now that this research project has been completed, that authentic and deliberate writing instruction is an absolute necessity in the modern classroom of the twenty-first century.

Summary

In this chapter, I have covered, to a further degree, the results and findings of this project, as well as what I have learned as a researcher, a writer, and as a learner. Not only that, but they have been also been compared to that which was discovered through the Review of the Literature. I have also discussed what the limitations of this project were, as well as the many suggestions I had for what could be done further to address those limitations in further studies, either by me, or from future researchers. Beyond that, I

have finally gotten to answering the question that has been at the heart of this project from the very beginning: *How can fourth grade educators increase student motivation to write and strengthen students' writing skills using the workshop model?*

It is my opinion that by utilizing a workshop-based writing instruction model, such as the *Units of Study* curriculum, educators of fourth graders – or any grade-level– can set their students up for utter success - and the data collected throughout this project absolutely supports this claim. That not only pertains to the skills and abilities required of the twenty-first century citizen, but also the confidence and enthusiasm by which to do so.

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APPENDIX A

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.2.a

Introduce a topic clearly and group related information in paragraphs and sections; include formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.2.b

Develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.2.e

Provide a concluding statement or section related to the information or explanation presented.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.5

With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grade 4).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.4.7

Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

APPENDIX B

Rubric for Book One

American Revolution Research Project: Book 1 Rubric

Research

- Gathered information from a wide variety of **sources**.
- Took **notes** from lectures, lessons and readings.
- **Synthesized** gathered information in your own words.

Structure

- Book contains a minimum of **5 chapters**
 - o Introduction/"All About the American Revolution" chapter,
 - o A concluding chapter at the end,
 - o 3 other chapters in the middle regarding your sub-topic,
 - o May also include your historical fiction piece.
- Each chapter is set up as a "mini-essay", with a thesis statement, reasons backed up by evidence and a conclusion.
- There is a logical **structure** to the organization of your book (topic, subtopics, categories).

Content

- You have a **thesis statement** that directly connects to your topic and is clearly stated throughout your book.
- Your topic is relevant to the American Revolution and is **introduced clearly**.
- You support your thesis with **reasons** and back it up with solid **evidence**.
- Your included facts are historically accurate (within reason).

Mechanics/Logistics

- Essay is free of spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.
- Used the **Writing Process** of planning, researching, drafting, revising and editing.
- You properly utilize chapters and paragraphs (with indentation) to structure your book.
- Used in-class worktime effectively!
- Handed in **on time**!

APPENDIX C

Rubric for Book Two

American Revolution Research Project: Book 2 Rubric

Research

- Gathered information from a wide variety of **sources**.
- Took **notes** from lectures, lessons and readings.
- **Synthesized** gathered information in your own words.

Structure

- Book contains a minimum of **5 chapters**
 - o Introduction/"All About the American Revolution" chapter,
 - o A concluding chapter at the end,
 - o 3 other chapters in the middle regarding your sub-topic,
 - o May also include your historical fiction piece.
- Each chapter is set up as a "**mini-essay**", with a thesis statement, reasons backed up by evidence and a conclusion.
- There is a logical **structure** to the organization of your book (topic, subtopics, categories).

Content

- You have a **thesis statement** that directly connects to your topic and is clearly stated throughout your book.
- Your topic is relevant to the American Revolution and is **introduced clearly**.
- You support your thesis with **reasons** and back it up with solid **evidence**.
- Your included facts are historically accurate (within reason).
- You include at least **5 text features** (pictures, graphics, captions, index, table of contents, glossary, etc.).
- Included at least **2 quotes**.
- At least ONE chapter (or section) where you discuss YOUR opinion regarding your topic (it can also be incorporated into other sections too.)

Growth

- **You used the feedback from your original book to make a plan on how to improve from your first book to your second.**
- Your content is more thorough and complex compared to your first book (your information goes deeper).
- You have a strong and thoughtful **conclusion**.
- Your essay incorporates the appropriate **writing style** for a historical essay.

Mechanics/Logistics

- Essay is free of spelling, punctuation and grammatical errors.
- Used the **Writing Process** of planning, researching, drafting, revising and editing.
- You properly utilize chapters and paragraphs (with indentation) to structure your book.
- Used in-class worktime effectively!
- Handed in **on time!**

APPENDIX D**Student Interest Survey****Student Interest Survey**

- 1) How many years have you gone to this school?
- 2) On a scale of 0-10 (zero being more negative, 10 being more positive), how would you rate your interest in writing *in general*?
- 3) On a scale of 0-10, how would you rate your interest in writing *in school*?
- 4) What type of writing do you most enjoy (Fictional stories? Genres? Personal essays? Persuasive essays? Research papers? Book reports?)
- 5) What type of writing do you least enjoy working with?
- 6) About how many hours a week do you work on writing in school?

- 7) About how many hours a week do you work on writing outside of school?
- 8) Do you enjoy writing for fun (not for assignments)?
- 9) Do you agree that writing instruction is important? Why or why not?

APPENDIX E

Student Writing Instruction Survey

Student Writing Instruction Survey

1. How many years of schooling have you used *Units of Study* (Writer's Workshop) for writing?
2. On a scale of 0-10 (with zero being negative, ten being positive), how would you rate....
 - a) Your interest/enthusiasm for writing fiction?
 - b) Your interest/enthusiasm for writing nonfiction?
 - c) Your interest/enthusiasm for Writer's Workshop?
 - d) Your confidence in your writing abilities?
3. What is the most important or interesting thing you've learned from *Units of Study* so far in your schooling?
4. Do you think that *Units of Study* is preparing you for your future, as far as writing skills go? Why or why not?

5. If not, what do you think would be a better way to gain important skills that would benefit you in your future?

APPENDIX F

Observation/Field Notes Template

OBSERVATION/FIELD NOTES

Date: _____ Number of Students Present: _____ Topic of Lesson: _____

Time at the Beginning of Lesson: _____

Time at the End of Lesson: _____

Duration of the Lesson: _____

Duration of Writing Time: _____

Number of students focusing their efforts today on the lesson's presented ideas:

How many students requested assistance on their writing during the duration of writing time: _____

- Define the types of assistance students requested and list the approximate amount of time spent with each:

Describe any breakthrough moments that took place during today's lesson/worktime. Does anything specific stand out?

At the end of the worktime, ask the class to show a "fist-to-five" on how their work went for them today; describe the results of this: _____

On a scale of 1-10, how on-task and diligent did the class as a whole work during the duration of the given writing time (1 being not on task at all, 10 being extremely on-task and productive): _____

Use the back of this form to list out and describe any anecdotes or episodes that took place that may be of particular interest.

APPENDIX G

Interview Template

Interview Questions

Student Pseudonym:

Date:

- What is your topic?
- Tell me how things are going and where you're currently at in the writing process.
- What has been the most challenging part of writing this book so far?
- What has been the most enjoyable part of writing this book so far?
- At this point, how comfortable are you with this type of essay/informational writing? Do you enjoy it? How have your abilities changed with this type of writing since the beginning of the school year?
- Do you think the curriculum has been successful in getting you to this point where you're writing books based your research findings? Why or why not?

APPENDIX H

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

<p><i>Hamline University</i></p> <p>Institutional Review Board has approved this consent form.</p>
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Informed Consent to Participate in Research

You are being asked to participate in a research study. This form provides you with information about the study. The student researcher or faculty researcher (Principal Investigator) will provide you with a copy of this form to keep for your reference, and will also describe this study to you and answer all of your questions.

This form provides important information about what you will be asked to do during the study, about the risks and benefits of the study, and about your rights as a research participant.

- If you have any questions about or do not understand something in this form, you should ask the research team for more information.
- You should feel free to discuss your potential participation with anyone you choose, such as family or friends, before you decide to participate.
- Do not agree to participate in this study unless the research team has answered your questions and you decide that you want to be part of this study.
- Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you can refuse to participate or withdraw at any time.

Title of Research Study: On the Importance of Deliberate Writing Instruction: How implementing the writing workshop model in fourth grade classrooms increases student motivation to write and strengthens student writing skills.

Student Researcher and email address: Joshua R. Baumgartner;
jbaumgartner01@hamline.edu

Faculty Advisor, Hamline affiliation/title, phone number(s), and email address: Trish Harvey, EdD, Assistant Professor, EdD Program Director, 651.523.2532,
tharvey03@hamline.edu

1. **What is the research topic, the purpose of the research, and the rationale for why this study is being conducted?** The topic of this study is on the importance of deliberate writing instruction in elementary schools. The purpose of this study is to explore whether explicitly teaching writing and implementing an authentic writing workshop model in elementary classrooms improves both student interest and motivation to write, as well as their skills and competency with this type of work. The research has shown that writing often is not taught in an explicit way throughout U.S. public schools, and the lack of focus on writing has had overwhelmingly detrimental effects the population at large. It is the belief of the researcher

that without deliberately teaching students what strong writing looks like and the process by which it is created, as well as giving them the opportunities to authentically practice writing in a variety of contexts, educators are not setting students up for success. Therefore, the rationale of this study is to explore whether explicitly teaching writing and giving students many opportunities to practice this work in an authentic way leads to more motivated students who are skilled in communicating through the written word.

2. **What will you be asked to do if you decide to participate in this research study?** Over the course of 6-8 weeks, while the class works through the 3rd unit of the 4th grade *Units of Study* (2013) writing curriculum, participants will be asked to fill out interest surveys and surveys regarding writing instruction. These will be given at the beginning of the unit, midway through the unit, and at the conclusion of the unit and will be filled out in the classroom. Each survey is less the two pages in length and includes no more than 9 questions. In addition, 4 students will be randomly selected to be a part of a focus group, where they will be interviewed 3 times throughout the course of the unit, and their work will be analyzed throughout the writing process.
3. **What will be your time commitment to the study if you participate?** 5-10 minutes, 3-6 times over the course of a 6-8 week writing unit.
4. **Who is funding this study?** Study will be conducted without funding.

5. **What are the possible discomforts and risks of participating in this research study?** By participating in this study, there is a small chance of some inconvenience to the participating students, given the time and energy it will take to fill out the surveys and/or to be interviewed. There is also the possible risk that there may be a loss of confidentiality for those participating in the study, however unlikely. In addition, there may be risks that are currently unknown or unforeseeable. Please contact me at jbaumgartner01@hamline.edu or my faculty advisor Trish Harvey at tharvey03@hamline.edu to discuss this if you wish.
6. **How will your privacy and the confidentiality of your data and research records be protected?** In any dissemination of data, the participants will be given pseudonym and there will be no written record regarding which participants are being addressed by which pseudonym. All data collected and information obtained will either be in a locked cabinet in the researcher's classroom, on their person, or in a locked cabinet within the researcher's home. In the event that some sort of record is created that could be used to identify any participants, once the study is complete, said documents will be shredded/destroyed.
7. **How many people will most likely be participating in this study, and how long is the entire study expected to last?** About 19 students will be participating in the study (within which there will be a focus group of 4 students) and the study will last about 6-8 weeks.
8. **What are the possible benefits to you and/or to others from your participation in this research study?** The primary benefit that the researcher will receive by conducting this study is the beneficial information that will be accumulated throughout its course. This information will also hopefully help others who are doing work on the subject. Another benefit of this study on the researcher will be that the final paper will be published.
9. **If you choose to participate in this study, will it cost you anything?** No.
10. **Will you receive any compensation for participating in this study?** No.
11. **What if you decide that you do not want to take part in this study? What other options are available to you if you decide not to participate or to withdraw?** Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You are free to refuse to participate in the study, and your refusal will not influence your current or future relationships with Hamline University or New City Charter School. In addition, if significant new findings develop during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to continue participation, we will provide that information to you.
12. **How can you withdraw from this research study, and who should you contact if you have any questions or concerns?** You are free to withdraw your consent and stop participation in this research study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits for which you may be entitled. If you wish to stop your participation in this research study for any reason, you should tell me, or contact me at (jbaumgartner01@hamline.edu or 612.554.5010), or Trish Harvey at tharvey03@hamline.edu or 651.523.2532. You should also call or email Trish Harvey for any questions, concerns, suggestions, or complaints about the research and your experience as a participant in the study. In addition, if you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact the Institutional Review Board at Hamline University at IRB@hamline.edu.

- 13. Are there any anticipated circumstances under which your participation may be terminated by the researcher(s) without your, or your parent/guardian's, consent?** No.
- 14. Will the researchers benefit from your participation in this study?** The researcher will gain no benefit from your participation in this study beyond being provided a dissertation, the publication and/or presentation of the results obtained from the study, and the invaluable research experience and hands-on learning that the students will gain as a part of their educational experience.
- 15. Where will this research be made available once the study is completed?** The research is public scholarship and the abstract and final product will be cataloged in Hamline's Bush Library Digital Commons, a searchable electronic repository and that it may be published or used in other ways, such as in conference presentations or published in research journals.
- 16. Has this research study received approval from New City Charter School where the research will be conducted?** Yes.

PARTICIPANT COPY**Signatures:**

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

Signature and printed name of person obtaining consent Date
(Student researcher or PI)

Title of person obtaining consent

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this Form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

Printed Name of Participant

Date

Signature of Participant



Signature of Principal Investigator or Faculty Advisor

Date

INVESTIGATOR COPY**(Duplicate signature page for researcher's records)****Signatures:**

As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

 Signature and printed name of person obtaining consent Date
 (Student researcher or PI)

 Title of person obtaining consent

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this Form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

 Printed Name of Participant

 Date

 Signature of Participant



 Signature of Principal Investigator or Faculty Advisor

 Date